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**U.S. POLICY AND RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN THE
TRANSCAUCASUS SINCE 1991**

by

Yunus Kotaman

June 1999

Thesis Co-Advisors:

David Yost
Mikhail Tsyppkin

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Yunus Kotaman
First Lieutenant, Turkish Army
B.A., Turkish Army Academy, Ankara, 1992

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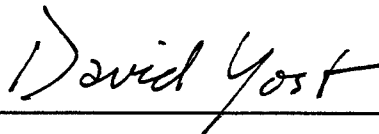
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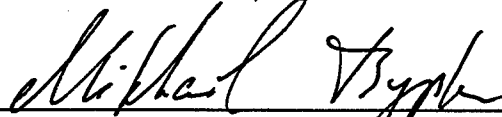


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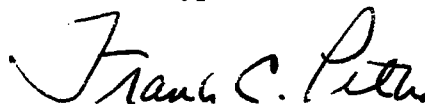
Approved by:



David Yost, Thesis Co-Advisor



Mikhail Tsypkin, Thesis Co-Advisor



Frank C. Petho, Chairman
Department of National Security Affairs

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines United States policy towards the Transcaucasus countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—since they gained their independence in 1991 and evaluates the implications of United States policy for the future stability of the region. The thesis assesses the security interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and evaluates the interests and policies of Russia and the United States in the region. The thesis concludes that the prospects for the countries of the region will depend mainly on three factors: their own domestic stability and political leadership, Russia's policies, and Western policies. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, United States policy in the Transcaucasus has been ineffective in promoting the independence and prosperity of the Transcaucasus countries. For various reasons, including the emphasis placed on ties with Russia, the United States has been unwilling to pursue an assertive policy towards the region. The thesis recommends a United States policy that would promote compliance with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe principles regarding the newly independent states and particularly Russia. This would help the region's countries build their own security structures, and would promote constructive regional cooperation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The three states of the Transcaucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—and the United States share various interests. The most important shared interest resides in the fact that the Transcaucasus stands on the way of the planned pipelines which will carry the Caspian Sea Basin oil and natural gas to Western markets. Considering the increasing demands for energy, the significance of the region's reserves is great.

As the Soviet Union began to dissolve and lose influence, the Transcaucasus was one of the first places to go through serious disorders and conflicts. Mostly stemming from separatist movements, several armed conflicts have destabilized the Transcaucasus over the past eight years. National myths and historical memories were among the underlying factors that inspired the conflicts. As soon as the totalitarian pressure was released, these destabilizing forces became operative. Tensions in Karabakh triggered a war in the late 1980s.

Each of the Transcaucasus countries has to consider the regional conflicts taking place on its territory as a primary issue to resolve. At the same time, two blocs are emerging in the region. One of them involves Russia, Armenia, and Iran. The other includes Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Moldova. It seems that this pattern will continue for a considerable time. Nevertheless, the countries of the region have to balance their relations between Russia and the other countries. The influence of Russia on these countries formed over the centuries, especially during the Soviet period, is not easy to overcome.

Independence has not prevented Russian interference in these countries' internal affairs. Russia describes the other former Soviet republics as its "near abroad" and pursues an intrusive policy to realize its national interests regarding these countries. Russia asserts that the

Transcaucasus is critically important because it borders the most restive region of the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus.

Despite the significance of the region, the West has mainly ignored the Transcaucasus states since they gained their independence in 1991. This lack of concern has stemmed from the old habit of considering these states as part of—or under the influence of—Russia, a reluctance to intervene in the armed conflicts, and/or a lack of understanding of the complex dynamics of the interstate relations in the region.

Overall, the influence of Western policy in the Transcaucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been short-sighted and ineffective. While the West has allowed Russia to reassert its influence in the region, it has done little to improve regional cooperation or to promote economic development.

The United States should pursue a more assertive policy in the region. It should cultivate its relations with the Transcaucasus countries as it does with the other independent countries of the world, and it should expect every country to respect the independence and sovereignty of the Transcaucasus countries.

In promoting security in the Transcaucasus, the countries of the region also bear a special responsibility. The regional powers—especially, Iran, Russia, and Turkey—should bolster regional security and economic co-operation and support the political and economic development of the newly independent states in the Transcaucasus. Whether all three of these countries will play a constructive role remains to be seen.

As the only NATO country in the region, Turkey should be ready to assume an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the region. In this regard, United States-Turkish cooperation is essential.

I. INTRODUCTION

What are the implications of United States policy towards the Transcaucasus? Is United States policy consistent with the security interests of the region's states and with Russian policy?

The Russian tsars tried for more than two hundred years to conquer the Transcaucasus. They completed the conquest in the 1860s. Since then, except for the period since the Soviet collapse in 1991, the three Transcaucasus states—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—were able to enjoy freedom only for a very short period at the end of the First World War. They declared their independence in 1918 and were occupied by the Red Army in mid-1921. With the signing of the Treaty of the Formation of the USSR on December 30, 1922, they were incorporated into the Soviet Union.

The Bolsheviks manipulated disputed territories and boundaries to create two autonomous republics in Azerbaijan and two autonomous republics and one autonomous oblast in Georgia. When the communist power began to collapse in the 1980s, this ethnic and territorial structure contributed to the resentments and tensions that led to enormous bloodletting.

As the Soviet Union began to dissolve and lose influence on its periphery, the Transcaucasus was one of the first places to go through serious disorders and conflicts. Mostly stemming from separatist movements, several armed conflicts have destabilized the Transcaucasus over the past eight years. National myths and historical memories were among the underlying factors that inspired the conflicts. As soon as the totalitarian pressure was released, these destabilizing forces went into work. Tensions in Karabakh triggered a war in the late 1980s. In the mean time, secessionists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were challenging the government in Georgia.

The Transcaucasus region has no tradition of modern statehood. It is inhabited by various religious and ethnic groups. They generally share a history of friendship and tolerance. However, at times they have demonstrated animosity and violence. Some state boundaries in the region are not precisely defined, a circumstance which may cause some disputes.

All of the three states and the United States share mutual interests. The most important shared interest resides in the fact that the Transcaucasus stands on the way of the planned pipelines which will carry the Caspian Sea Basin oil and natural gas to Western markets. Considering the increasing demands for energy, the significance of the region's reserves is great.

During the period of Soviet rule, all of the important economic and political decisions were taken in Moscow, ignoring the local interests. Though this was one of the factors that caused the end of the Soviet Union, its consequences in the Transcaucasus were negative and destructive. As the Soviet Union began to dissolve and lose influence on its periphery, the Transcaucasus was one of the first places to go through serious unrest and conflicts.

In addition to the Soviet legacy of weak local governments, several factors have come together to create the current situation of unrest in the Transcaucasus. The most important factors include the ethnic conflicts, the disputed boundaries, the growing problem of corruption, the volatility of the current transitional period, and the uneven distribution of national economic wealth.

The problems of economic breakdown and poverty in the region can not be attributed to a lack of economic resources. The Transcaucasus has agricultural and mineral wealth. With respect to energy resources, it is one of the wealthiest regions in the world. The main reason for the economic failure in the region is closely related to the persistent political turmoil and associated

problems in the management of resources. Privatization is one of the challenges that lies ahead for the governments in the Transcaucasus.

Since the Transcaucasus countries are landlocked—except Georgia—and threatened by Russian neo-imperialism, regional cooperation is vital for the prosperity, independence, and stability of these countries. Without regional cooperation, they will never reach the desired level of prosperity, and ultimately they will be dependent on outside powers both economically and politically. The great potential of the Transcaucasus states will not be fulfilled unless those states are willing and eager to work cooperatively. Regional conflicts currently constitute the greatest hurdle to regional cooperation and good relations. Despite the intensive diplomacy and negotiations, the problems have remained unresolved, and it would be naïve to think that they will be resolved overnight.

Independence has not prevented Russian interference in these countries' internal affairs. Russia describes the other former Soviet republics as its "near abroad" and pursues an intrusive policy to realize its national interests regarding these countries.

United States policy towards the region is very important because it has a tremendous effect on the behavior of the Transcaucasus states and the other regional powers. Indeed, United States policy is a significant factor in determining the security map of the region.

Despite the significance of the region, the West has mainly ignored the Transcaucasus states since they gained their independence in 1991. This lack of concern stemmed from the old habit of considering these states as part of—and/or under the influence of—Russia, a reluctance to intervene in the armed conflicts, or a lack of understanding of the complex dynamics of relations in the region.

In summary, this thesis analyzes United States policy towards the countries of the Transcaucasus region since their independence and evaluates its implications for the future stability of the region. To this end, the thesis briefly discusses the region's history; assesses the security interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; and evaluates the interests and policies of Russia and the United States in the region. The analysis examines the rationales of United States policy and its effects on regional stability.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE REGION

The Transcaucasus has been a crossroads of great civilizations. In particular, four civilizations have had great influence in the region: the ancient Persian; the Roman and ancient Christian; the Islamic, both in its Persian and Turkish versions; and the modern Western, which includes Russia.¹

Iran's influence had the longest and the deepest impact in social and political life of the Transcaucasus. (Although the ancient civilization of Iran is commonly called "Persian," this thesis employs the term "Iranian." The name of the country was officially changed from Persia to Iran in 1935.) Both Alexander's conquest of Iran and the spread of Greco-Roman influence could not replace or eliminate the Iranian cultural influence, "largely because Greco-Roman hegemony over the region was transitory and episodic."²

Although the Roman influence was stronger and it was extended over a longer period, it did not result in the Latinization of Georgia and Armenia, "nor did it eliminate Iranian cultural influence." The Sassanid empire reasserted and expanded Iranian influence in the Transcaucasus in 226 A. D. while the rivalry with Rome continued.³

Despite the fact that the Roman political and military presence in the Transcaucasus began as early as 68 to 69 B. C., Roman cultural influence became prevalent only after the Christianization of both Rome and the region in the fourth century A. D. The spread of Christianity into the Transcaucasus initiated a gradual but serious and continuing process of distancing between Iran and the Christian world. "Even so, Iranian traditions survived and continued to affect the region's cultural development, from art to literature. Alongside these

¹ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 6

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. p. 7.

traditions, the Roman influence, especially the Eastern Byzantine version, would also become a powerful force in the cultural evolution of the Christian Transcaucasus.”⁴ The estrangement from Iran would show its impact in later centuries, particularly from the eighteenth century onward, with the gravitation of Transcaucasian Christians toward Russia.

Although the spread of Islam during the seventh and eighth centuries left a deep impact on the social and cultural environment of the Transcaucasus, it did not lead to the cultural Arabization of the region. Nor was it successful, like Christianity, in drastically transforming the region's cultural traditions.⁵

During the rule of the Safavids after 1492, Iran reasserted its political influence in the Transcaucasus. However, this time it had to face significant rivals: initially the Ottoman empire and later the Russian empire; it eventually gave in to the latter. Initially, because of the strong cultural links and religious affinity with some of the region's peoples, Russia was unable to completely terminate the region's links with Iran. However, the social, economic, and political decline of Iran and Russian encouragement of cultural estrangement between Iran and Azerbaijan led to the weakening of Iran's cultural influence in Azerbaijan by the turn of the century. At the same time Azerbaijan developed and asserted a distinct cultural and national identity, moving closer to the Ottoman empire as a new policy line emerged among the Azerbaijani elite.⁶

Although Turkologists believe that Turkic elements were present in the Caucasus as early as the fifth century, the Turkish influence began to be felt after the Turkic tribes entered the region in relatively large numbers in the eleventh century A.D. “The Turkic peoples left one lasting and extremely important legacy—namely their language—which ever since has affected

⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

the region's cultural and political development... Because of the importance of language in determining the self-identity of peoples, many of the linguistically Turkified, but ethnically non-Turkic peoples have come to identify themselves as Turks.”⁷ The process of Turkification has had effects on the political and cultural alignment of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Transcaucasus.

After the emergence of the Ottoman Empire in the late thirteenth century, these influences became stronger in the region, especially in Azerbaijan. On the other hand, the Ottoman confrontation with Armenia led to serious estrangement between the two countries, which has its impact in today's politics.⁸

During the past two centuries, Russian influence became prevalent in the region, reaching its peak during the period of Soviet rule. In 1828 Russia defeated Iran (then better known as Persia) and annexed the area around Erivan, which resulted in thousands of Armenians becoming subjects of the Russian Empire.⁹

Between 1915 and 1917, Russia occupied almost the entire Armenian part of the Ottoman Empire. However, upon the Bolshevik victory in Moscow, Russian troops left the Caucasus. During the ensuing short period, Armenia first joined a Transcaucasian federation with Azerbaijan and Georgia, which Armenia soon decided to be unreliable. In May 1918, an independent Armenian republic was declared, and it endured until December 1920. In November 1920, facing the approaching Soviet threat, the Armenian government made a political agreement with the communists to enter a coalition government.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid p. 10.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. 11.

⁹ Glenn E. Curtis. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country studies*. Washington, D.C., 1995. p. 12

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 16

“The Russian period affected, in particular, the character of relations among the region's various ethnic and religious groups and their links with neighboring areas. Russian domination deepened the rift between the region's Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants. It even exacerbated interethnic rivalry among the Christians, because the Russian overlords tended to shift their favors from one group to another.”¹¹

Nonetheless, when assessing today's events, it is important to consider the influence of the Soviet period because it had a tremendous influence in the region in the immediate past. The four primary Soviet legacies to the region's countries were as follows: first, the unclear territorial divisions, and ethnic conflicts; second, historical revisionism and myth-building; third, economic dependence; and fourth, bureaucratic fiefdoms and a clientelist mentality.¹²

Within the Soviet Union, Armenia was initially combined with Azerbaijan and Georgia to form the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR). The Transcaucasian Federation was formed on March 12, 1922. It joined the Soviet Union as the TSFSR on December 30, 1922, incorporating the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian republics. It was dissolved with the promulgation of a new USSR constitution on December 5, 1936, and the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian republics became separate constituent SSR's of the USSR.¹³

During the communist era, especially under Joseph Stalin, while on one side nationalism was suppressed powerfully, on the other side Armenia was changed dramatically by Moscow, both socially and economically.

¹¹ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 12.

¹² Ibid. pp. 13-17

¹³ Paul B. Henze, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*. RAND, 1991. p. 4

Control of Nagorno-Karabakh had been disputed by the briefly independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan after World War I. The Soviet Union designated Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous region under Azerbaijani jurisdiction within the TSFSR in 1924. As the Azerbaijani population began to grow, hostilities between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations also began to grow as early as 1960.¹⁴

As Moscow began to lose its control on the periphery, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue came to the surface. The Armenians held that the region should become a part of Armenia. In early 1988, there were clashes between the two sides, which escalated and continued through 1989. Following the intensification of the hostilities on both sides, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians elected their own national council and declared the secession of Karabakh from Azerbaijan and its unification with Armenia. After the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union abolished the Special Administrative Committee and returned control of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, Armenia refused to comply and declared the region a part of Armenia in December 1989.¹⁵

On 16 May 1994, for the first time in six years of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the warring sides agreed on a cease-fire. The accord was reached in Moscow, during the talks among the defense ministers of the three sides—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh—with the mediation of Russia.¹⁶ Since the introduction of the cease-fire, the OSCE Minsk group has been seeking to resolve the issues among the sides. Until now, it has been unsuccessful in devising a plan that is acceptable to all three sides.

In April 1920, the Red Army invaded Azerbaijan. Russian leader Vladimir I. Lenin ordered the invasion due to Baku's oil resources. Because of the ongoing civil war, the oil

¹⁴ Glenn E. Curtis. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country studies*. Washington, D.C., 1995. p. 96

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 21

¹⁶ "Further Details on Cease-Fire Agreement" [Moscow] ITAR-TASS. (16 May 1994). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

reserves were important for the Bolsheviks.¹⁷ In mid-1920, Nakhichevan—an Azerbaijani enclave between Armenia and northwestern Iran—was invaded by the Red Army. The Red Army declared Nakhichevan a Soviet Socialist Republic with close ties to Azerbaijan. In early 1921, a referendum confirmed that most of the population of the enclave wanted to be included in Azerbaijan. Turkey also accepted this solution. Nakhichevan's close ties to Azerbaijan were confirmed by the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Kars among the three Transcaucasian states and Turkey, both signed in 1921.¹⁸

However, in accordance with Lenin's and his successor Stalin's objectives of pacification of the Transcaucasus and delineation of borders in the region, Nakhichevan—despite opposition from Azerbaijani officials—was designated as an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan with wide local powers.¹⁹

During World War II, Soviet forces occupied the northern part of Iran, using the existence of an Azerbaijani majority population in northern Iran as a pretext. They instigated an irredentist movement fronted by the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. The party proclaimed the communist Autonomous Government of Azerbaijan at Tabriz at the end of 1945. The Western powers forced the Soviet Union to withdraw from Iran in 1946. Following the collapse of the autonomous government, the Iranian government began cruel suppression of the Azerbaijani culture.²⁰

¹⁷ Glenn E. Curtis. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country studies*. Washington, D.C., 1995. p. 91

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 92

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

The annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century started a period in Georgian history that would last nearly two hundred years. During this period, Georgia welcomed Russian domination in order to maintain its security against the Ottoman Empire.²¹

After a short period of independence that had been declared in 1918, the Red Army invaded Georgia in 1921. Within the same year, Georgia became part of the TSFSR. This status continued until the TSFSR was split up into Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 1936.

During the Stalin period, thousands of Georgians were executed, including many Georgian intellectuals and artists. In spite of the fact that Stalin and Lavrenti Beria—his chief of secret police from 1938 to 1953—were both Georgians, they suppressed Georgians as severely as they suppressed citizens of other Soviet republics.²²

The first ethnic issue that challenged Georgia was in the South Ossetian Autonomous Republic. The Ossetes are a Caucasian people of the North Iranian language group. The majority of them live in the Republic of North Ossetia in the Russian Federation. They received an autonomous district within Georgia in 1922.²³

In December 1990, Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia abolished South Ossetia's autonomous status within Georgia as a reaction against its struggle to gain independence. When South Ossetia took initial steps toward secession and union with North Ossetian Republic of Russian Federation, Georgian troops invaded the republic. The ensuing conflict continued throughout 1991 and early 1992. In July 1992, a cease-fire was introduced by the mediation of Russia.²⁴

²¹ Ibid. p. 159

²² Ibid. p. 163

²³ Helen Krag, Lars Funch. *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads*. Minority Rights Group, 1994. pp. 23-26

²⁴ Glenn E. Curtis. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country studies*. Washington, D.C., 1995. P. 171

The Abkhazian dispute emerged as early as 1978 when leaders of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic threatened to secede from Georgia, maintaining that Tbilisi imposed unfair cultural, linguistic, political, and economic restrictions. At the time, Eduard Shevardnadze was the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party. He took a series of steps that increased the role of Abkhazian elites in controlling the region despite their minority status in Abkhazia.²⁵

In July 1992, the Abkhazians voted to return to the 1925 constitution, according to which Abkhazia was separate from Georgia. In response, Tbilisi sent the Georgian National Guard to the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi to protect Georgian rail and road supply lines and to secure the border with Russia. The Abkhazian reaction to these steps touched off the war that continued intensively until the 1994 de facto cease-fire.²⁶

When analyzing current events in the region, it is necessary to take this long and complex historical background into consideration. Although there are some changes, the long-formed relationship patterns continue to shape the conduct of the region's countries.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 165

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 174-175

III. SECURITY INTERESTS OF THE TRANSCAUCASUS STATES

Today, together with the Balkans, the Transcaucasus is one of most conflict-ridden regions of the world. Although there are various reasons for the conflicts, the main reason is closely related to the Soviet style of "divide and rule" governing. The primary causes of the conflicts in the region include the large numbers of ethnicities and undefined borders, dissatisfaction caused by the deportation and ethnic cleansing policies carried out by the Soviet government, age-old rivalries and animosities, and the release of the USSR's pressure.

Since 1991, the Transcaucasus states, just like the rest of the newly independent states, have been undergoing a transition period. Therefore, it is, to a certain degree, normal for these countries to exaggerate their threat perceptions. They experience at least five transition phenomena, "from communism to something else; from command to market economies; from underdevelopment to modernity; from domination to independence; and from global or regional power to a lesser status for the near term."²⁷

When determining their security interests, the Transcaucasus states have to consider in the first place the armed conflicts taking place on their territories. Disputed borders, ethnic diversities, historical rivalries and resulting conflicts are the primary factors in shaping the national security policies.

The countries of the region, except Georgia, are landlocked. Unstable governments and weak economic infrastructures are common characteristics of all three countries. Regional cooperation is therefore vital for the prosperity, independence, and stability of the Transcaucasus states. Armenia, however, seems to align itself with Russia against Azerbaijan. Without regional cooperation, they will never reach the desired level of prosperity, and ultimately they will be

²⁷ Paul H. Herbert. "Considerations for US Strategy in Post-communist Eurasia." *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*; Carlisle Barracks. Spring 1997. pp. 22-23

dependent on outside powers both economically and politically. The great potential of the Transcaucasus states will not be fulfilled unless these states are willing and eager to work cooperatively.

Although some Western media commentators describe the conflicts in the Caucasus as religious conflicts, in fact they are not. The Christian minorities in Abkhazia—Russians, Armenians, and Greeks—actively participated in the war that Abkhazia waged against Tbilisi. Muslim Iran has sided with Christian Armenia against Azerbaijan, while Georgian-Turkish relations are prospering. The North Caucasian peoples, mainly of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish heritage, joined the Abkhazians and the Ossetians in their struggle against Georgia.

A. Armenia

Armenia is one of the most densely populated of the former Soviet republics. Armenia is a landlocked country between the Black and the Caspian Seas, bordered on the north and east by Georgia and Azerbaijan and on the south and west by Iran and Turkey.

For Armenia, resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has been the number one policy priority since its independence. When the Soviet Union started to disintegrate, the Karabakh issue came to the surface. The Karabakh Autonomous Republic, with a population of 80 percent ethnic Armenians, wanted to be united with Armenia. It sent its formal request to Moscow and Baku; however, neither government welcomed this demand. Moscow rejected the Armenian demand, and Azerbaijan decided to use force. The war over Nagorno-Karabakh began in 1988.

In May 1994, for the first time in six years of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the warring sides agreed on a cease-fire. The accord was reached in Moscow during the talks among the

defense ministers of the three sides—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh—with the mediation of Russia.²⁸

Since the introduction of the cease-fire, the OSCE Minsk group has been seeking to resolve the issues between the two warring countries. The most complicated problems include the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh; the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's territory; the future of the cities of Lachin and Shusha; and the repatriation of the Azeri refugees from the Armenian-occupied territories.

Armenia has been uncomfortable about the internationalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At a news conference on March 16, 1992, Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian expressed misgivings concerning the rapid widening of the circle of countries and sides taking part in resolving what he called "a regional problem."²⁹

Throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Armenian officials persistently stated that Armenia was not a belligerent in the war and that it was a war of Azerbaijan against its own citizens. Armenia's objectives in adopting this particular strategy were (a) to avoid internationalization of the conflict and (b) to prevent it from turning into a religious struggle.³⁰

Although Armenia had great interest in the independence of the self-proclaimed "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic," it was waiting for another state to recognize it first, because otherwise its decision might be considered as meddling in Azerbaijan's internal affairs.³¹

According to the Armenian government, before the current president, Robert Kocharian, took office in March 1998, a permanent solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem could be

²⁸ "Further Details on Cease-Fire Agreement". [Moscow] ITAR-TASS. (16 May 1994). Available [FBIS]: <http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin> [15 January 1999]

²⁹ "President on 'Internationalization' of Talks". [Moscow] Izvestiya. (18 March 1992). Available [FBIS]: <http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin> [15 January 1999]

³⁰ "Wants Peace-Keeping Forces". [Budapest] NEPSZABADSAG. (3 March 1992). Available [FBIS]: <http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin> [15 January 1999]

found only if Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination was respected. Erivan stated that Armenia was not an active participant in the dispute and that it was ready to accept any solution that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh agreed with.

After Kocharian took office in 1998, irredentism was adopted as a foreign policy principle. In an interview, Armenian foreign minister Vardan Oskanian said, "Hai Dat—the Armenian cause—will become one of the main directions in the foreign policy of the new government."³²

Shortly after he took power, Kocharian outlined his principles for settling the Karabakh conflict as follows: "No subordination of Karabakh to Azerbaijan; no enclave existence of Karabakh within Azerbaijan; and reliable security guarantees to Karabakh."³³

The position of the Karabakh Armenians on the issue is that they have rejected vertical subordination to Azerbaijani government and have refused to return a land corridor—Lachin—which is the only connection with Armenia. The status of Lachin is one of the most difficult issues to resolve in the peace negotiations.

For Armenia, Russia has been the "big brother" for centuries. It has always looked to Russia to protect itself from external threats. Armenia was the first country to support the idea of the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. From its perspective, there was no alternative, and it resolved to support the CIS organized at Moscow's initiative.³⁴

³¹ "President on 'Internationalization' of Talks". [Moscow] Izvestiya. (18 March 1992). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

³² "Irredentism Enters Armenia's Foreign Policy." Monitor. 22 April 1998. Vol 4. Is. 77. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

³³ "Kocharian Outlines Policies as Newly Elected President of Armenia." Monitor. 9 April 1998. Vol 4. Is. 69. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

³⁴ "President on Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan". [Moscow] Komsomolskaya Pravda. (5 March 1992): 2. Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

The security mentality which has been formed throughout decades is also shaping Armenia's security policies today. In 1993, Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrossian summarized his view on the necessary post-Soviet security model for Armenia: "We proceed from the assumption that in this unstable situation, this transitional period, Armenia could not risk its security, could not leave a security system created over decades."³⁵

All of the three Transcaucasus states have experienced some form of economic chaos. To make the situation worse, the Armenian help for Nagorno-Karabakh further crippled its economy by both exhausting the domestic resources and resulting in the blockades by Azerbaijan and (to some extent) by Turkey.

Besides, Armenia experiences significant energy shortages. Because of growing energy shortages, Armenia decided to put the nuclear power plant back into operation which had been shut down by order of the Soviet government in 1989 because of the powerful earthquake in December 1988. Before it was shut down, the plant had provided 40 percent of Armenia's energy needs.³⁶ In order to support the operation of the Medzamor nuclear power plant, Russia extended a US\$ 20.6 million credit to Armenia under an agreement signed in Moscow in December 1998.

Relations with Turkey are among the most debated policy issues in Armenia. The Armenians hold Turkey responsible for what they call a "genocide" in 1915 whereas Turkey denies it. This issue is one of the major obstacles to developing positive relations between the two states. The other issue is related to the Armenian claims on Nagorno-Karabakh.

³⁵ Ter-Petrossian quoted in Daniel Sneider. "Russia and the Caucasus: Empire in Transition." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 13 December 1993. Available [LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

³⁶ "Supreme Soviet Decides to Activate Nuclear Plant." [Moscow] Interfax. (19 March 1993). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

Despite these negative factors, there was a great deal of improvement in Armenian-Turkish relations shortly after Armenia gained its independence. Ter-Petrosian first mentioned the possibility of reconciliation with Turkey when he visited the United States in October 1990. In 1992, there was a considerable increase in Armenian-Turkish interactions. It was to such an extent that Western observers thought Armenia was becoming increasingly pro-Turkish. President Ter-Petrosian felt obliged to explain the process and said, "Russia has been and will be our main foreign policy priority and we are linked with long-standing political, economic, and spiritual bonds with Russia. However, Armenia is an independent state and it is not oriented to any particular country. Our policy is neither pro-Russian nor pro-Turkish and our ambition is to establish normal relations with all states, including Turkey. We've made some progress in this sphere."³⁷ Nevertheless, Ter-Petrosian's Turkey policy was one of the factors that caused his removal from power.

In April 1993, Turkey stopped the passage of foreign aid to Armenia through its territory because of the stepped up attacks by Armenian troops against Azerbaijan.³⁸

Although at present there is no Turkish blockade on Armenia, Turkey has closed its border with that country. Recently, the Turkish government announced that "Turkey would reopen the land border if Armenia and Azerbaijan could agree on a declaration of principles to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."³⁹

³⁷ "Ter-Petrosyan Views Government's Goals, Karabakh, Military." [Moscow] Interfax. (11 November 1992). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

³⁸ "Turkey Carrying Out 'Warning Flights' on Armenian Border." [Moscow] ITAR-TASS. (3 April 1993). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

³⁹ John E. Herbst, US Interests in the Caucasus, Hearing Before the US Congress House Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, US Government Printing Office (Washington: 1996), p 73

The Dashnaksutun party, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), has had a significant place in Armenian history and political life since 1991. Currently, the Dashnak party is the most powerful and best-organized force in the diaspora.

President Ter-Petrossian suspended the party's activities in December 1994, accusing it of engaging in terrorism, sabotage, and narcotics smuggling. In January 1995, the party's activities were suspended formally by the Armenian Supreme Court. However, the court avoided making a decision on the charges of terrorism and instead ruled that "it had violated a ban against foreign nationals belonging to Armenian political parties."⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the same Armenian government, in need of support in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, decided to relegalize the party. In face of the growing international pressure to make concessions to resolve the conflict, the Armenian leadership sought dialogue with the Dashnak party because it was the only organization that could thwart this pressure. The ARF controls one of the two key Armenian-American lobbying groups. With the efforts of these groups, the Armenians succeeded in persuading the United States Congress to prevent United States government aid to Azerbaijan by enforcing section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. Their latest triumph was to provide economic aid to Karabakh by circumventing Baku.⁴¹

Armenia had the advantage of staffing its army without difficulty, thanks to the large number of ethnic Armenian officers in the Soviet Army. No other country in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia had this advantage. Because of its ethnically pure society, Armenia had, and still has, the strongest ethnic cohesion and sense of national identity among the former Soviet republics.

⁴⁰ Emil Danielyan. "The Re-legalization of Armenia's Dashnak Party on the Cards." Prism. 5 December 1997. Vol 3. Is. 20. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁴¹ Ibid.

Armenia opposes the idea of NATO's enlargement to the east, following the Russian views on this issue. In 1995, the Armenian government opposed NATO participation in settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, giving the Kremlin a strong argument to prevent NATO from becoming active in the Transcaucasus.⁴²

Recently, there has been ever-growing military cooperation between Russia and Armenia. In April 1997, the Russian Duma ratified the treaty with Armenia which formalized the Russian military bases in that country. Besides obligating Armenia to contribute to the expenses of the Russian troops by 30 percent and allowing unrestricted overflights "in the interest of Russian bases," the treaty also provided for additional Russian troops in Armenia by mutual approval to deal with natural calamities or "a threat to the security of either side."⁴³

In July 1998, Marshal Igor Sergeev, the defense minister of Russia, held talks with Armenian political and military officials. The focal points of these talks were: "(1) a plan to 'upgrade' the armament and the equipment of Russian forces stationed in Armenia; (2) an increase in Armenia's contribution to the financing of joint military activities; (3) admission of additional Armenian military cadets to Russian military schools; planning of new joint military exercises; (4) incorporating Armenia's air defense forces into the Russian-led air defense system of the CIS; and (5) possible deliveries of Russian S-300 soil-air missiles to Armenia—the type that Moscow plans to deliver to Cyprus."⁴⁴

⁴² Armen Khanbabayan. "Ties Between Moscow and Yerevan are Growing Stronger." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 17 November 1995. Available [LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

⁴³ "Duma Ratifies Treaty on Russian Military Bases in Armenia." *Monitor*. 21 April 1997. Vol. 3. No 78. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁴⁴ "Marshal Sergeev in Armenia." *Monitor*. 16 July 1998. Vol 4. Is. 136. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

The anti-Turkish policy was not caused by an apparent provocation by the Turkish side but by Armenia's own considerations. Its way of viewing the security environment pushed Armenia to seek Russian protection.

Instability in Georgia causes strong concerns in Erivan. Because of the blockade enforced by Azerbaijan, the Georgian territory is the only land route that connects Armenia to Russia.

Armenian-Iranian relations are good, since both states are trying to put pressure on Azerbaijan.

B. Azerbaijan

For Azerbaijan, as with Armenia, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue comes first among the policy priorities. However, contrary to Armenia's preference for CIS forces in the first place, Azerbaijan has favored the UN and NATO as the peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan has significant energy resources, and this is a major factor in its foreign policy. It is a landlocked country, and therefore needs pipelines to transport the Caspian Sea Basin oil to the markets.

Azerbaijan is a multiethnic society including almost all of the ethnicities which also live in the north Caucasus. One of them is the Lezgins. They reside in the Dagestan Republic of the Russian Federation. The 1989 USSR census registered almost 200,000 Lezgins in northern Azerbaijan and nearly 300,000 in the Dagestan Republic.⁴⁵ What makes the Lezgins a problem for the Azerbaijanis is the Sadval (unity) movement which is active on both sides of the border. The movement has the goal of unifying the Lezgins into one territorial entity. The Russian

⁴⁵ "Azerbaijan Targeted by Lezgin Group." Monitor. 9 October 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 188. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

authorities, sometimes using the Dagestan authorities, have sought to manipulate the Sadval against Azerbaijan.

The problem surged in the spring of 1996 when the Azerbaijani authorities sentenced two Lezgins to death and five others to prison terms for a deadly bomb attack in the Baku subway. Azerbaijan also published a list of 96 people, most of them ethnic Lezgin residents of Dagestan, who had been banned from entering Azerbaijan. Following these developments, the Dagestan Republic "officially asked Russia's foreign ministry to intercede [regarding] what it termed 'repeated cases of persecution of Dagestan residents by Azerbaijan.'"⁴⁶

In October 1996, the organizing committee of a Lezgin people's congress warned Azerbaijan by issuing a declaration which asked Russia to deploy its border troops on Azerbaijan's border with Turkey and Iran. This call was in complete harmony with Moscow's own plans concerning Azerbaijan at the time.⁴⁷

Sometimes Lezgin sympathizers in the Russian Duma uphold the issue of Lezgin irredentism. The Sadval movement, besides the territorial demands, "calls for introducing dual Azerbaijani-Russian citizenship for Lezgins in Azerbaijan, 'mandatory transport of Azerbaijani oil via Russian territory,' and a share of the oil transit fees to be reserved for Lezgins."⁴⁸

The lack of an officer cadre and a standing army is a major problem for Azerbaijan. In 1992, Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov pointed out the significance of the problem for Azerbaijan. "Our situation is more complex than in other republics, such as Ukraine where half

⁴⁶ "Lezgin Problem Simmering." Monitor. 8 May 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 90. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁴⁷ "New Lezgin Warning to Azerbaijan." Monitor. 10 October 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 189. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁴⁸ "Lezgin Irredentism Aired in Duma, Disavowed by Ambassador in Baku." 13 June 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 116. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

of the officers in military units are Ukrainian. Our situation is not the same. If we call for the withdrawal of all non-Azerbaijani personnel, we will have nothing but empty buildings.”⁴⁹

From the beginning of its independence, Azerbaijan accused Russia of preventing the development of the Azeri military forces. In January 1992, Azeri defense minister Tadzheddin Mekhtiev said that the Russian military leaders had been raising obstacles to the Azeri armed forces buildup.⁵⁰

Azerbaijan perceives Russia as a threat, and thus it seeks NATO's support. In April 1996, Azerbaijani President Haidar Aliev met with NATO secretary general Javier Solana in Brussels to submit the document that contained the proposals of Azerbaijan for its participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. The proposals envisaged, “among other things, NATO assistance in developing a modern civil defense system for Azerbaijan, providing modern communications equipment for Azerbaijan's military, training an Azerbaijani contingent for participation in international peace-keeping operations, assisting Azerbaijan's effort against terrorism ‘including Armenian originated terrorism,’ and deploying NATO units for peacekeeping operations in Karabakh after conclusion of a political agreement on the principles of settling that conflict.”⁵¹ In response NATO officials made clear that the issue of Azerbaijan joining the alliance was not on the agenda in the near future. The discussions centered on the expansion of Azerbaijan's participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program.⁵²

During Aliev's visit to Brussels, a presidential aide stated that “Baku had considered military cooperation with Russia as an option for regaining sovereignty in Karabakh, but has

⁴⁹ “Mutalibov Interviewed on Relations with Turkey.” [Istanbul] Milliyet. (15 January 1992): 10. Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

⁵⁰ “Russia Said to Obstruct Military Buildup.” [Moscow] Interfax. (13 January 1992). Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

⁵¹ “Azerbaijan Outlines Goals for Cooperation with NATO.” Monitor. 26 April 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 82. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

refused to allow Russian troops to return to Azerbaijan and has found CIS collective security arrangements 'purely declarative.' Baku 'pins special hopes on NATO to help restore Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.'"⁵³

When NATO Secretary General Solana visited Baku as part of a tour of four CIS countries—Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—in February 1997, Aliiev proposed that NATO be active in promoting a political settlement to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. In response, Solana deferred the issue to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).⁵⁴

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan supports the participation of international organizations. At the Lisbon summit of the OSCE in 1996, it endorsed the following principles: the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh as one of the highest degrees of self-rule within Azerbaijan, and the guaranteed security of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijani-Russian relations are not good. In 1990, the Russian military and the KGB planned and executed an operation in Azerbaijan in order to prevent the country's secession from the USSR by restoring the communist party's control of the republic. During that crackdown, 132 demonstrators were killed and more than 700 were wounded. Today, the incident is remembered every year with ceremonies. Azeris consider Alexander Lebed one of the persons responsible for the incident. This is one of the sensitive issues between the two states.

⁵² "US Envoy to NATO Maps out Cooperation with Baku and Tbilisi." Monitor. 20 October 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 195. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁵³ "Azerbaijan Outlines Goals for Cooperation With NATO." Monitor. 26 April 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 82. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁵⁴ "Solana in Azerbaijan." Monitor. 17 February 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 33. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

The last Russian troops stationed on Azerbaijani soil were withdrawn in May 1993. As time passed, the quality of Russian-Azeri relations increasingly disappointed the Russians, particularly the communists. They wanted a "Russia-Belarus community" model relationship. Azerbaijan was also dissatisfied with the relationship. Unable to solicit enough support for what Baku considered the appropriate solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, Aliev stated that the self-interest of Azerbaijan would determine its policy toward the CIS. In June 1996, he reproached a Russian delegation, declaring that "gross mistakes in nationality policies were one of the reasons for the disintegration of the USSR. The Russian Federation is allowing similar mistakes to be committed today... if you want the Russian Federation to be solid and cohesive, you must show due respect to each people."⁵⁵

Azerbaijan has suffered enormous economic losses caused by the blockade imposed at the Azerbaijani-Russian border to isolate Chechnya. Its request to Russia to lift the blockade did not receive the desired reaction from Moscow.

Some of the points of contention in Azeri-Russian relations include Baku's demands for equal treatment by Russia for all countries in the CIS, for stopping the attempts to create supra-national bodies within the CIS, for the removal of Russian military bases from Georgia and Armenia, for the evacuation of the military hardware delivered by Russia to Armenia, and for an investigation in Russia regarding the unlawful arms deliveries.⁵⁶

Facing the growing Russian military build-up in Armenia, Baku stepped up its criticism. Regarding the intention of Russia to deploy S-300 missiles in Armenia, Baku argued that the move would violate the CFE treaty and destabilize the Transcaucasus. The Russian side, on the

⁵⁵ "Aliev Admonishes Duma's Communists." Monitor. 12 June 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 111. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁵⁶ "Aliev Lists Policy Differences with Moscow." 3 April 1998. Vol. 4. Is. 65. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

other hand, confirming its intention, stated that the missiles were to replace the obsolescent S-75 and S-125 missiles.⁵⁷

Azerbaijan's other concern was over the ratification of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Flanks agreement which endorsed Russia's build-up of military equipment in the Caucasus region. Already worried about Russian military bases in Armenia, Azerbaijan was the last of the 30 participating countries to ratify the accord, and did so with a little US urging.⁵⁸

It is not clear whether Azerbaijan could be so straightforward in rejecting Russian troops on its soil if it did not have the oil. Nevertheless, this is a great asset for Azerbaijan in its quest for complete independence.

Compared to the Azerbaijani-Russian border, the Azerbaijani-Iranian border is much more active. There is a free trade zone in Astara, an Iranian district, and the Azerbaijani side wishes to increase the number of them. In August 1996, the foreign minister of Azerbaijan, Hasan Hasanov, protested to Tehran for its failure to grant permission to open an Azerbaijani consulate in Tabriz.⁵⁹ What worries Iran is the fact that Tabriz is a large city, with an estimated population of 6 million ethnic Azeris. Given the history of Azeri irredentism in the region, Iran has reasons to move cautiously towards more open borders.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani-Iranian relations have a tendency to remain tense because of the fact that twice as many Azerbaijanis live in northern Iran as in Azerbaijan. This factor is viewed as a potential threat of Azeri separatism or irredentism by Iranians.

⁵⁷ "Azerbaijan Broadens Criticism of Russia's Military Involvement in the Region." 21 July 1998. Vol. 4. Is.139. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁵⁸ "Nudged by Washington, Azerbaijan is Last to Ratify CFE Flanks Accord." 19 May 1997. Vol. 4. Is. 98. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁵⁹ "Azerbaijan, Iran Move Cautiously toward More Open Borders." Monitor. 26 August 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 157. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

The Azeri government under Aliev has been trying not to irritate the Iranians. The caution in Azeri-Iranian relations also emanates from Iranian criticisms of the close Azeri-Israeli relations. Tehran views the Azeri-Israeli relations as an obstacle to better relations with Baku. On the other hand, Baku openly states that it relies on the Israeli lobby in the US.⁶⁰

One of the reasons for the uneasy Baku-Tehran relations is Baku's crack down on Iranian-related religious activities in Azerbaijan. In April 1997, the government of Azerbaijan arrested the leaders of the party of Islam and sentenced them to prison for Iranian links. This further strained Azeri-Iranian relations.⁶¹

Another point of conflict has emerged regarding the issue of sharing the Caspian Sea Basin oil. Azerbaijan holds the same view as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. These three states want to keep national rights to offshore oil in their sectors, whereas Russia insists on the principle of collective rights to offshore resources and refuses to recognize national sectors. Iran supports Russia on this issue. This problem results from the vagueness of the Caspian Sea Basin's legal status. The littoral countries' shares change depending on whether it is regarded as a sea or a lake.

Although both states suffer from the same trouble (ethnic conflicts), Azerbaijan's relations with Georgia are good. Despite the Abkhaz and the Ossetian conflicts, Azerbaijan has placed enough confidence in the Georgian government to support the projected pipeline route passing over Georgian soil. In February 1997, presidents Aliev and Shevardnadze signed "a Declaration of Deepening Strategic Partnership, an agreement on cooperation in the oil industry

⁶⁰ "Azerbaijan-Iran Ambivalence." Monitor. 29 August 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 160. Available [online]: <http://www.jamestown.org> [10 January 1999]

⁶¹ "Azerbaijan Sentences Islamist Leaders for Iran Links." 15 April 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 74. Available [online]: <http://www.jamestown.org> [10 January 1999]

and oil transportation, and other documents in bilateral cooperation.”⁶² There is an ever-growing bilateral cooperation between these two countries. The planned east-west pipeline project will pass through Georgian territory.

The opening of a Europe-Central Asia transit corridor via Georgia and Azerbaijan is one of the policy priorities in both Baku and Tbilisi. The recently created Georgia-Azerbaijan-Ukraine-Moldova (GUAM) group of countries aims to support direct Europe-Asia transit, circumventing Russian territory. This group is founded on the four countries’ common interests, such as resisting separatism and promoting the settlement of regional conflicts, developing commercial transit routes from Central Asia to Europe, and transporting Caspian Sea Basin oil across Georgia and the Black Sea to Ukraine and Moldova in order to reduce dependence on Russian oil.⁶³

Although relations with Turkey are significant for Azerbaijan, Baku could not get the degree of support it expected from Ankara. Aliiev expressed his indignation during his visit to Turkey in May 1997. In his statements in various places, he expressed regret about Ankara’s refusal to introduce a mutual assistance clause in the military cooperation agreement. He criticized Turkey about growing Turkish-Armenian trade despite the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁶⁴

According to an analysis published in Britain, “The basic pillars of Azerbaijani foreign policy are to balance its interests between Russia and Turkey in the first place; to increase its developing contacts with Western states, using the leverage of its Caspian Sea oil; to remain on

⁶² “Aliiev, Shevardnadze Discuss Major Regional Projects.” 21 February 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 37. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁶³ “Shevardnadze, Aliiev, Lucinschi Close Ranks to Promote Vital Interests.” Monitor. 2 December 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 224. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁶⁴ “Is Aliiev Losing His Diplomatic Touch?” 12 May 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 93. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

good but not close relations with neighboring Iran, where millions of Azeris also live; to continue membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and to develop, especially, better relations with the Central Asian states, which are, like Azerbaijan, moderately Moslem.”⁶⁵

C. Georgia

The Georgians regard the Soviet establishment of the two autonomous republics—the Abkhaz and the Adjar autonomous republics—and the South Ossetian autonomous oblast within their republic as trickery planned to weaken their position and provide Moscow with an opportunity to manipulate minorities in order to strengthen its own position.⁶⁶

Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s nationalist policies, during his chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet in 1990-1991 and his presidency in 1991-1992, exacerbated the problems with the minorities of Georgia. The conflict in South Ossetia worsened during the winter of 1990-1991, with serious clashes between Georgians and Osetes in Tskhinvali. It went on until the summer of 1992.

Before the war, the Georgians formed 46 percent of the population in Abkhazia, where the Abkhazians amounted to 17 percent, ethnic Armenians 15 percent, and ethnic Russians 14 percent.⁶⁷ Abkhazia, an autonomous republic within Georgian borders, is struggling for complete independence. The quest for independence in Abkhazia goes back to the 1970s. Tbilisi insists that the region is an inseparable part of Georgia.⁶⁸ In June 1992, the leader of the National Front of Abkhazia, Sergey Shamba, warned in Moscow that his republic could “become one more

⁶⁵ John Lloyd, Steve Levine. “Survey of Azerbaijan.” *The Financial Times* (London). 7 March 1994. p III. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

⁶⁶ Paul B. Henze, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*. RAND, 1991. p. 5

⁶⁷ Helen Krag, Lars Funch., *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads*. Minority Rights Group, 1994. p.14

⁶⁸ Zaal Anjaparidze. “Georgia and the Abkhaz Question.” *Prism*. 20 March 1998. Vol. 4. Is. 6. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

hotbed of tension,” because they, the Abkhazians, had “practically lost hope for civilized settlement of the problem of Abkhazia’s state set up.”⁶⁹

After Gamsakhurdia ran away in 1992, Shevardnadze assumed responsibility in March 1992, in order to fill the political vacuum in Georgia. He was partly able to calm down the South Ossetian issue. On the other hand, the Abkhazian problem turned out to be thornier. Shevardnadze’s efforts to achieve a settlement with Abkhazia were undermined both by his own military commanders—he had little control over them—and by Russia, which encouraged the Abkhazian leadership.⁷⁰

In Abkhazia, the Georgian army fought against at least three forces: the Abkhazian separatists, the armed groups of the Confederation of the People of the Caucasus, and separate Russian army units.

In September 1992, a cease-fire agreement was signed between Georgia and Abkhazia with the mediation of Russia. However, Russian actions after the agreement were strongly criticized by the Georgian government. It accused the Russians of not respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia and of constantly interfering in Georgia’s internal affairs. According to Shevardnadze, the events which damaged Georgian-Russian relations were the result of “the political processes in Russia and Russia’s unstable and uncertain policy regarding the Caucasus.”⁷¹ He stated that Russia was not fulfilling its peacemaking function.

The three most debated issues in the peace negotiations were as follows: first, Russia’s stipulation that Moscow would only be willing to sign an economic cooperation agreement with Georgia if Tbilisi was ready to make concessions regarding the Abkhazia issue; second, Russia’s

⁶⁹ “Abkhazia Leader Discusses Future of Republic.” [Moscow] Interfax. (11 June 1992). Available [FBIS]: <http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin> [15 January 1999]

⁷⁰ Paul B. Henze, *Georgia and Armenia, Troubled Independence*. RAND, 1995. p. 4

desire to consider the Abkhazia issue a factor in Georgian-Russian relations—that is, Moscow's failure to recognize it as an internal affair of Georgia; third, and the most important issue for the Georgians, Russia's reluctance to negotiate on what Georgia would receive from the Soviet properties situated on Georgian territory. These properties included military bases, military factories, and telecommunication infrastructure. Nevertheless, of special interest to Tbilisi was the Black Sea Fleet. Tbilisi wanted to get a share of the fleet because there were major naval bases in Batumi and Poti.⁷²

Georgia's minority problems are not limited to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Recently, another issue that has begun to trouble the Georgian government is related to the republic's second autonomous region, Ajaria.

In October 1993, the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria Supreme Council Presidium issued an appeal to the population of Georgia: "At this difficult time for the nation and the motherland, the leadership of Ajaria, while continuing to concern itself with the resolution of problems by political methods, appeals to the inhabitants of all the regions of Georgia, political parties, social organizations, and armed formations: The time has come for all of us to come to our senses, put down our weapons, unite, and overcome strife and mistrust, and immediately halt the shameful civil war that is destroying and crushing the nation and country so that we can avoid its destructive consequences and set about rebuilding the country."⁷³ The document was signed by Aslan Abashidze, chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Ajaria.

In December 1996, the same person signed and issued an unprecedented statement which protested to Tbilisi for its not authorizing the creation of a free economic zone and which

⁷¹ "Shevardnadze Interviewed on Relations with Russia." [Budapest] Nepszabadsag. (5 January 1993): 3. Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

⁷² Ibid.

accused Tbilisi of “ignoring the autonomous republic’s interests” and of “solving none of Ajaria’s pressing problems in the last few years.”⁷⁴ From that time on many such protests have been made.

In December 1997, Abashidze declared via the official news agency of Russia that Russian border and army troops in Ajaria were the guarantors of regional stability. He warned Tbilisi against nationalism and recommended friendship with Russia.⁷⁵

All of these statements were made before or during Russian official visits to the region which confirmed the presence of a Russian hand. According to plausible scenarios, Russia, seeking to direct the Caspian Sea Basin oil flow to its own Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, knew that an Ajarian break with Georgia could endanger the construction of the pipeline to Turkey. Another motive for this Russian activity could be Moscow’s expectation that it might continue to keep its troops in Ajaria, if Georgia expelled them.

Mingrelia—the Black Sea region of western Georgia that borders Abkhazia—is another trouble spot for Tbilisi. It is the stronghold of the Zviadists—the supporters of former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. President Shevardnadze has sent troops to Mingrelia four times since Gamsakhurdia’s removal from power in January 1992 to suppress the uprisings. The best-known of these uprisings took place in 1993 when Gamsakhurdia returned to Mingrelia in an attempt to overthrow Shevardnadze. It was during this rebellion that Shevardnadze barely escaped from falling into the hands of the Zviadists, thanks to the help of the Russians.

⁷³ “Ajarian Leaders Appeal for Unity, Halt to Civil War.” [Tbilisi] Sakartvelos Respublika. (14 October 1993):1. Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

⁷⁴ “Ajarian Shot Across Georgia’s Bow?” Monitor. 11 December 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 231. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁷⁵ “Will Moscow Play the Ajar Card in Georgia?” Monitor. 16 December 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 234. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

The Mingrelians are closely related to the Georgians. However, they have undergone a linguistic transformation since the eighteenth century. Until the 1930s, the Mingrelians were treated as a separate ethnicity; from that time onward they were officially classified as Georgians. Gamsakhurdia himself was a Mingrelian. The Georgian authorities hold that the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze was planned in Mingrelia.⁷⁶

The Armenian minority in Georgia lives compactly in the Akhalkalaki region. There are signs that this region may become the objective of Armenia's irredentist policies.

Georgian-Russian relations are more complex than they may seem. Unlike Azerbaijan, which has oil and thus can be selective about its alliances, Georgia is far more dependent on Russia. When Gamsakhurdia attempted to regain power, Shevardnadze had to fight against him. During the fight, Shevardnadze came close to being killed and was saved by the Russians. In return, Shevardnadze was forced to accept Georgia's joining the CIS and the establishment of Russian military bases in Georgia.⁷⁷

Since Shevardnadze was a true follower of Gorbachev and his perestroika policies, he has been called one of the destroyers of the USSR among some Russian political elites. This is one of the reasons for his sour relations with them.⁷⁸ This factor probably also helps to explain why they have put pressure on Tbilisi.

The stumbling block in Russian-Georgian relations is the status of the Russian army. President Shevardnadze, aware of the fact that it would be difficult for Georgia to maintain its territorial integrity without links with Russia, chose the pragmatic alternative and signed an agreement with Russia. The political parties in Georgia strongly opposed the treaty. They wanted

⁷⁶ Igor Rotar. "Mingrelia: Georgia's New 'Hot Spot'" Prism. 17 April 1998. Vol. 4. Is. 8. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁷⁷ Paul B. Henze, *Georgia and Armenia, Troubled Independence*. RAND, 1995. p. 4

Russia to admit its aggression against—and its annexation and occupation of—Georgia, and to withdraw its forces.⁷⁹ However, the supporters of the agreement knew that without Russian assistance it would be difficult to settle the Abkhaz conflict.

In February 1993, the political parties demanded that the Russian army withdraw and be given the status of an army of occupation. The Georgian parliament voted to declare that the Russian army could no longer remain on Georgian territory because it had involved itself in the conflict over Abkhazia. The parliament also asked President Shevardnadze to hold talks with Russian President Boris Yeltsin to discuss the Russian troops' withdrawal.⁸⁰ However, parliament ignored the fact that the Georgian army was being built from scratch. Where would Georgia get weapons and spare parts for its equipment if Russians left?

According to Shevardnadze, the defeat of the reactionary forces in Russia, on October 3-4, 1993, signaled the beginning of a new period of Georgian-Russian relations. These developments contributed to Georgia's joining the CIS.

On the other hand, the signing of the agreement was not a harbinger of harmony in Georgian-Russian relations. The Russians continued to play on the Abkhazian side, and as long as they did so, Tbilisi postponed the ratification of the agreement. Moscow used every opportunity to minimize Georgian influence in Abkhazia. Moscow bypassed Tbilisi in October 1995 by entering into a protocol with Abkhazia on the repair and reopening of an important Caucasus railroad line that passes through Abkhazia.

⁷⁸ Georgy Bovt, Georgy Dvali, Natalya Kalasnikova. "The Sun Rises on the North. The Question is Where It Will Set." *Kommersant Daily*. 23 September 1995. pp. 4-5. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

⁷⁹ "Political Parties Oppose Signing Treaty with Russia." [Moscow] *Izvestiya*. (23 January 1993): 2. Available [FBIS]: <<http://fedworld.gov/cgi.bin>> [15 January 1999]

⁸⁰ "Russia-Georgia Quarrel Intensifies After Sukhumi Raid." The Xinhua General Overseas News Service, Moscow. 26 February 1993. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

In September 1995, a treaty was signed in Tbilisi which provided Russia with the right of long term use of military bases in Vaziani, Akhalkalaki, and Batumi. The treaty also endorsed the repatriation of ethnic Georgian refugees to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia signed the military basing treaty because it needed Russian support in settling the conflict with Abkhazia.

In January 1996, Tbilisi declared to Moscow that it would ratify the September 1995 treaty only after Georgian sovereignty in Abkhazia was restored. It warned that otherwise it could demand the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia.⁸¹

At the October 1997 CIS summit, Shevardnadze asked Russian President Boris Yeltsin to explain the reasons for several policies that encroached on Georgian national interests. These included Russia's hiding terrorists who had committed terrorist acts in Georgia; Russia's backing of Abkhazia despite the fact that Georgia and Russia had signed four agreements since 1992 involving Russian guarantees; Russia's removal of all modern military equipment from Georgia in 1991-94; Russia's violation of CIS agreements on sharing the ex-USSR's military property; and Russia's refusal to give Georgia its share of the ex-Soviet Black Sea Fleet.⁸²

The debate on Russian military bases in Georgia is still going on. Whenever Tbilisi threatens Russia with closing the military bases, Moscow uses the trump cards of the Black Sea Fleet and "military technical cooperation" to discourage Tbilisi from taking such a step. In fact, Georgia is in no position to demand the closing of the Russian bases. With a ruined economy, Georgia needs Russia to settle the conflict in Abkhazia and to create an army.

In September 1996, Georgia signed a bilateral agreement with Uzbekistan on military cooperation and partnership. Both sides declared that "their countries would not join a CIS

⁸¹ "Georgia Links Russian Bases to Abkhazia Settlement." Monitor. 4 January 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 3. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁸² "Shevardnadze Confronted Yeltsin with Hard Questions at CIS Summit." Monitor. 30 October 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 203. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

military coalition or common CIS forces.”⁸³ They agreed that creation of such “forces may dangerously redivide the world and lead to international confrontation.”⁸⁴ This particular step was taken by Georgia as a result of its disappointment with the quality of Russian assistance in the creation of the Georgian army.

The location of Georgia is important since it is on the transit route which extends from the Caspian Sea Basin to the Black Sea and westward for Central Asian and Transcaucasian goods such as Kazakh oil and Uzbek cotton. It is also on the route of the planned pipeline which will carry the Caspian Sea Basin oil to Western markets.

After the Abkhazian war, the issue of repatriation of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia emerged as an important policy priority for Georgia. In March 1997, President Shevardnadze warned Russia that Tbilisi would terminate Russia’s peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia if it did not broaden the mandate of its troops at the CIS summit that month.⁸⁵ By enlarging both the area of operations and the mission of the Russian troops, Georgia was trying to ensure the security of Georgian refugees returning to their homes in Abkhazia. Russia refused to accept the conditions, arguing that the implementation of the decisions was subject to Abkhazia’s consent.⁸⁶

Georgia’s interests are mostly in agreement with those of Azerbaijan. Georgia needs Azerbaijani railroads in order to stay in contact with Russia and the other CIS member states. Azerbaijan needs the Black Sea ports of Georgia in order to export anything to the West.

Since Aslan Maskhadov was elected president of Chechnya in January 1997, the Chechen government has sought friendly relations with Georgia. Chechnya needs Georgia to be

⁸³ “Uzbekistan and Georgia, Wary of CIS Military Block, Signed Bilateral Agreements.” Monitor. 11 September 1996. Vol. 2. Is. 168. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Georgia Redefines Conditions for Peacekeeping in Abkhazia.” Monitor. 25 March 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 59. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁸⁶ “Russia Asked Why it Fails to Implement CIS Decisions.” Monitor. 21 October 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 196. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

independent from Russia since it has borders only with these two countries. As soon as Maskhadov was elected president, Chechnya recognized Georgia's territorial integrity; and he stated that Chechnya's previous policy of helping Sukhumi in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was a mistake.⁸⁷

Georgian-Turkish relations are very good, and there is an ever-growing bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Georgia has attached great significance to the maintenance of the Georgian-Ukrainian-Azerbaijani-Moldovan (GUAM) organization since its creation in October 1997.

In conclusion, each of the Transcaucasus countries has to consider the regional conflicts taking place on its territory as a primary issue to resolve. At the same time, two blocs are emerging in the region. One of them involves Russia, Armenia, and Iran. The other includes Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova. It seems that this pattern will continue for a considerable time. Nevertheless, the countries of the region have to balance their relations between Russia and the other countries. The influence of Russia on these countries formed over the centuries, especially during the Soviet period, is not easy to overcome.

⁸⁷ "Shevardnadze Meets Chechen Envoy." Monitor. 3 June 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 108. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

IV. THE RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN THE TRANSCAUCASUS

Russia has been in a transition period since the beginning of the 1990s. Having given up the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union, it has been trying to find its place in the new world order. Sometimes its policies raise serious questions in the West—for example, whether Russia will be able to suppress the imperialistic tendencies within itself and become a democratic state or whether it will become a new empire. An important sign of deviation from the democratic course was seen in March 1996, when the Russian Duma voted to declare the dissolution of the Soviet Union illegal while almost all of the former Soviet republics denounced this non-binding action.⁸⁸

Throughout history, the Transcaucasus has had an important place in Russian strategy. Two significant drives seem to have attracted Russia to the Transcaucasus. Both of these drives were also among the main factors that frame the Russian strategic culture. The primary drive was the tradition of expanding Russian domains, particularly since the fifteenth century. This resulted in the establishment of a multi-national empire under Russian control. Hence, the quest for strategic depth and access to the Baltic and Black Seas and the Pacific were among the primary objectives.

The other drive is the policy of forward deployment caused by the absence of natural frontiers, low population density, and poor communications. This drive can be regarded as the catalyst of the first drive.

The idea of “great Russia” also has a significant place in Russia’s strategic thinking. As a result of the historical developments, the Russian elite has associated Russian statehood with Russian imperialism. Thus, today for many Russians it is difficult to accept the reality that some

⁸⁸ Paul H. Herbert. “Considerations for US Strategy in post-Communist Eurasia.” *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*; Carlisle Barracks: Spring 1997. Vol. 27. Is. 1. pp. 22-33

of the territories no longer belong to Russia.⁸⁹ The loss of the Transcaucasus “has contributed to the perception that ‘the old real sense’ of Russia no longer exists.”⁹⁰

A set of Russian interests regarding the region emanates from Russian perceptions of insecurity, including the prospect that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the real threat to Russian national security will come from the south. In Russian strategic thinking, the Transcaucasus is a buffer zone against ideological and political threats from the south. Since the Transcaucasus is contiguous to the borders of the Russian Federation’s North Caucasus and there are several overlapping ethnicities in the two regions, Moscow believes that its North Caucasus is vulnerable to developments in the Transcaucasus.

For that reason, Russians believe that one form of threat to Russian national security may come from the intensification of the regional conflicts and their spillover effects on the Russian Federation’s territory. This is an especially important issue regarding Georgia and Azerbaijan, which have borders with the Russian Federation. Given that almost all the ethnicities of the North Caucasus also live in these countries, a conflict starting in Georgia or Azerbaijan has a high probability of spreading into the Russian territory or vice versa.

Another Russian apprehension is that the separatist movements in the Transcaucasus could incite similar movements in Russia. Russians fear that if Russia loses part of its territory, it will create a domino effect leading to additional territorial losses. The implications of this thinking are nowhere more obvious than in the Chechen war. Again, this is the reason why Russia, at least in its declaratory policy, supports the territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

⁸⁹ Margot Light. “Russia and Transcaucasia.” In *Transcaucasian Boundaries*. St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1996. p. 42.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 43.

Although Russia denounced separatism and upheld the principle of territorial integrity, it has referred to it as one of its weapons against the anti-Russian policies and leaders in the Transcaucasus as well as in the other republics of the former Soviet Union. Before the Chechen war, Russia used separatism overtly to achieve its goals. For example, in 1991, USSR Supreme Soviet Chairman Anatoly Lukyanov made to Moldovan president Mircea Snegur the famous remark, "If you want to get rid of separatism in Transdniestria, sign the Union Treaty."⁹¹ After realizing its vulnerability to separatist movements, Russia pursued these policies more covertly.

Russians also cite the prospect of intervention by external powers in the conflicts on Russia's periphery which, they think, directly threaten Russian national interests. Obviously, by external powers the Russians mean regional powers such as Iran and Turkey. The likelihood of being drawn into broader conflicts or even wars is Russia's concern in this particular case.

Therefore, Russia today prefers to recognize its military interests in the Transcaucasus more than its commercial and economic interests. Russia obviously hopes that by protecting the former, it will guarantee the latter, as in the past. Especially after having lost its control over Chechnya, Moscow has attached great significance to maintaining its troops in other parts of the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia and Armenia. In November 1992, Russia concluded military alliances with Armenia and Georgia to guard against external aggression.⁹²

The next step for Russia was to acquire military bases in the Transcaucasus. In this regard, Armenia, a long-standing ally of Russia, was the first country to accept Russian bases on its territory. In his presentation concerning the Russian military bases in Armenia, Russian first deputy foreign minister Boris Pastukhov explained the mission of the troops in that country as

⁹¹ Igor Rotar. "Abkhazia Set to Become a 'Second Chechnya' for Both Russia and Georgia." Prism. 27 June 1997. Vol. 3. No. 10. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁹² Yevgeni Krutikov, Guga Lalishvili. "Russia's Military Alliance in Transcaucasia." Kuranty. 4 November 1992. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: EUROPE/ALLNEWS [5 January 1999]

“ensuring, jointly with Armenian forces, the security of Armenia” and “protecting Russian strategic interests in the Transcaucasus...where external forces are doing their utmost to prevent Russia’s close cooperation with the region’s countries.”⁹³

The loss of the Transcaucasus and the Chechen war magnified the traditional Russian sense of insecurity. One of the Russian reactions to these developments was to demand a change in the treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). The CFE treaty was signed in November 1990 in the framework of the CSCE. Moscow argued for several years that it needed many more weapons than the treaty stipulated in the Caucasus and in the Leningrad military district. To buttress its argument, it noted its intervention in Chechnya and its participation in IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia. Eventually, Russia was successful in pursuing its aim; the May 1996 CFE Flanks agreement endorsed Russia’s build-up of military equipment in the Caucasus region.⁹⁴

Russia tried to fortify its military presence in the Transcaucasus, and even used its troops against the Transcaucasus countries. After the Sukhumi raid in February 1993, the Russian defense ministry initially denied any Russian involvement in the attack. However, three days later Russian foreign ministry declared that the bombing of Sukhumi was in retaliation for the Georgian army’s raids on Russian troops in Eshery. It warned Tbilisi that Russia would take the measures necessary to protect its military installations and to ensure the security of its soldiers and their families in Georgia. In the mean time, Russian defense minister Pavel Grachev made it clear that the Russian army would not withdraw since Russia had strategic interests along the Black Sea shores in Georgia.⁹⁵

⁹³ “Duma Ratifies Treaty on Russian Military Bases in Armenia.” Monitor. 21 April 1997. Vol. 3. No. 78. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

⁹⁴ Dorn Crawford. “Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE): A Review and Update of Key Treaty Elements.” US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Washington, DC, December 1997.

⁹⁵ “Russia-Georgia Quarrel Intensifies After Sukhumi Raid.” The Xinhua General Overseas News Service. Moscow, 26 February 1993. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: EUROPE/ALLNEWS [5 January 1999]

Another factor that concerns Russia is the Russian minorities in the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, some 22 to 25 million ethnic Russians were left living outside the territory of the Russian Federation. "Their status ranges from fairly thorough assimilation, as in Kazakhstan, to ostracism as an unwanted remnant of Soviet domination, as in the Baltic States."⁹⁶

Russia has used the issue of Russian minorities as a pretext to meddle in the internal affairs of the "near abroad" countries. The way that Russia deals with the problem has caused sharp criticisms of Moscow by the leaders of the newly independent states. In 1993, for example, the Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was referring to the Russian leaders when he said, "When they talk of protecting the interests of the Russian citizens of Kazakhstan, not Russia, I recall Hitler, who began with 'protecting' the Sudeten-Germans. This is very dangerous. Especially to the Russians living outside of Russia. They have never asked for protection."⁹⁷

Besides the geo-strategic interests, there are also economic interests for Russia in the Transcaucasus. An important matter of economic concern to the Russians is the Russian share of the Caspian Sea Basin oil. Since Russia knows that it does not have offshore resources as great as those which Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have in their national sectors of the Caspian Sea, it favors the principle of collective rights to the offshore oil. This position is the opposite of the stances of the three littoral countries of the former Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

Shortly after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia issued a demarche to Great Britain, asserting Russia's rights to veto any arrangements concerning the energy resources of the

⁹⁶ Paul H. Herbert. "Considerations for US Strategy in post-Communist Eurasia." *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*; Carlisle Barracks: Spring 1997. Vol. 27. Is. 1. pp. 22-33

Caspian Sea. The demarche confirmed the Western beliefs that Russia thought it had proprietary rights over the energy resources. It also revealed that Russia was ignorant of the sovereignty of the Transcaucasus states.⁹⁸

Even in its economic policies, Russia seems determined to play according to its own rules. In order to achieve its goals it has used various weapons in its arsenal. One of them is oil, owing to its pipeline monopoly. In 1996, Yuri Safrania, head of the Fuel and Energy Ministry in Russia, stated openly that Russia would not hesitate to use the oil weapon in its relations with the countries in the near abroad.⁹⁹ The Russian monopoly over the pipelines is about to be broken by the United States policies regarding Caspian Sea Basin oil and pipelines. Although the situation is changing in a positive direction, it seems that Russia will continue to use this weapon for some time as a means of influence over its neighbors.

Nevertheless, the existing pipeline which starts from Baku and ends in Russia's Black Sea port Novorossiisk is under threat. The pipeline passes through Chechnya, and Chechnya threatens Russian interests concerning the pipeline. Before the reopening of the pipeline carrying Azerbaijani oil, the Chechen government demanded a share in the project to pump the oil via Chechnya to Novorossiisk. In December 1996, the Chechens declared that the consortium should take the Chechen interests into account, or else it would not allow the transportation of the oil.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Vitaly Portnikov, Alexander Anin. "Moscow-Alma Ata, Moscow-Yerevan: Mutual Reproaches Reach Danger Line." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. 26 November 1993. p.1. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: EUROPE/ALLNEWS [5 January 1999]

⁹⁸ Stephen J. Blank. *Energy and Security in Transcaucasia*. Strategic Studies Institute. 7 September 1994. p VI.

⁹⁹ Elaine M. Holoboff. Seminar on Russia and NIS. Session Five: concluding session. (SAM Paper, 1996.) Available [Online] <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sam>

¹⁰⁰ "Routing Azerbaijani Oil: Chechnya Wants Its Share or Else." *Monitor*. 18 December 1996. Vol. 2. No. 236. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

The importance of the pipeline for the Russians is great. During the Chechen war, prevalent interpretations in the Russian media indicated that Moscow had begun the war in order to gain control over the land through which the Baku-Novorossiisk pipeline ran.¹⁰¹

In the current context, none of the countries on the Russian periphery is expected to be a long-term ally of Russia, with the exception of Belarus. Among all the Transcaucasus republics, there is a prevailing belief that Moscow deliberately incited conflict and animosity among them to assure and prolong its hegemony by debilitating their powers. A series of incidents of Russian meddling in these countries' internal affairs seems to corroborate this belief.

Nevertheless, there are certain Russian interests in the Transcaucasus countries. Russia is eager to maintain economic ties with Azerbaijan because about 80 percent of the former Soviet facilities manufacturing equipment for oil production are in the republic.¹⁰² Besides, Azerbaijan has a Russian radar base over which the two countries are negotiating.

The Russia-Armenia rapprochement is based on at least three factors. The first is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although the friendship between the two countries has a long history, Armenia has had to develop military cooperation with Russia to overcome the Azerbaijani threat since the beginning of the war. The other factors are the religious affinity (Christianity) and the economic dependence of Armenia on Russia.

Russian and Iranian interests converge regarding several policy issues. In a broader sense the agreement of interests is caused by United States and Turkish influence in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Thus, one of the points of Russian-Iranian agreement concerns anti-American

¹⁰¹ "...Says Oil Shipments Bypassing Russia Would Harm Russian and Chechen Economies." Monitor. 27 March 1997. Vol. 3. No. 61. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

¹⁰² Igor Lensky. "Correcting Mistakes." Russian Press Digest. 8 September 1993. p. 1. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: EUROPE/ALLNEWS [5 January 1999]

policies in both countries. Neither Moscow nor Tehran wants to see a growing American influence in the region.

Another convergence point in Russian-Iranian relations is economic. Russia, in need of hard currency, is ready to sell Iran arms and nuclear reactors which Iran is unable to get from the West because of the United States “dual containment” policy, among other factors. Moscow and Tehran agree on how to resolve the issue of sharing the Caspian Sea Basin oil.

Iran and Russia both wish to keep Azerbaijan weak and dependent on themselves, though their reasons are different. Russia’s main concern is to counter anti-Russian policies in Azerbaijan. Russian interests span from sharing the Caspian Sea Basin oil and constructing pipelines to the concern that ethnic problems could spread onto Russian territory.

Regarding the international organizations and their influence on Russian interests, Russian scholar Pavel Baev has argued as follows:

In Russia's view, international organizations will not be able to introduce any security structure for the Caucasus or even to provide a framework for conflict resolution. They are rather perceived as vehicles for penetration into the region for such real players as the US, France or Turkey. Recognizing its current political weakness, Moscow perhaps admits that the straightforward 'deny access' strategy for the Caucasus is no longer feasible. Dominance—which remains the paramount goal—must be secured by a more sophisticated policy, which involves, for instance, playing the international consortium against Azerbaijan, or Iran against the US. Russia's corner in such a game should be secured by its military preponderance.¹⁰³

Russian leaders think that certain United States initiatives such as NATO enlargement contradict the Alliance’s rhetoric of “Western cooperation with Moscow.” They see NATO enlargement as clearly directed against Russia. To add insult to injury, the division of the Black Sea Fleet, its incremental degradation, and frequent visits by United States naval ships increase the Russian apprehensions that the Black Sea is becoming a NATO lake.

How will Russia pursue its interests in the Transcaucasus region? According to Russian scholar Andrei Tsigankov, four schools of thought will influence the future of Russian foreign

policy: "international institutionalism; aggressive realism; defensive realism; and revolutionary expansionism."¹⁰⁴

Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika exemplify the practices of the international institutionalist school. According to this school of thought, if common humanitarian values are upheld, international support will follow. This school's influence prevailed from 1991 to 1994. Indeed, Russian and Western observers agree that as early as the end of 1992, the emphasis of Russia's security policy on cooperation with the West began to shift dramatically towards pursuit of its own agenda along the Russian periphery.¹⁰⁵

Today, the first school of thought—international institutionalism—seems to have lost its credibility. The Russians are not satisfied with current international support for Russia's transition to democracy and a market economy. In fact, their thinking can generally be best described with the "stab in the back" analogy.

The aggressive and defensive realist schools are better known in the West as the Euro-Asianist and Euro-Atlanticist schools respectively. Both schools agree that the need for security is the primary motive determining a state's behavior.

They differ regarding the means for achieving the objectives. The Euro-Asianists argue that the best way to protect Russian interests and to deal with the United States and NATO expansion is by adopting the policy of deterrence whereas the Euro-Atlanticists favor consolidating Russian influence in the "near abroad" by peaceful means such as diplomacy and cultivating relationships based on economic interests. While the Euro-Asianists favor moderate

¹⁰³ Pavel K. Baev. "Can Russia Do It Alone in the Caucasus?" Available [online]: <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr>>

¹⁰⁴ Tsigankov quoted in Sergo A. Mikoyan. "Russia, the US and Regional Conflict in Eurasia." *Survival*; London. Autumn 1998. Vol. 40. Is. 3. P.112.

¹⁰⁵ Mikhail Tsypkin. "The Politics of Russian Security Policy." In *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. M. E. Sharpe. New York, 1995. p. 11.

expansion of Russia beyond the current borders, the Euro-Atlanticists envisage the existence of an exclusive sphere of influence for Russia.

According to Shireen T. Hunter, there are several significant characteristics of the Euro-Atlanticist school.¹⁰⁶ First, for them, the domestic considerations have the priority; Russian foreign policy should facilitate transition to a market economy and democracy. Second, they think that integration with the West is necessary. This of course requires the renunciation of the imperialistic ambitions and messianic considerations that have dominated the Russian strategic culture. Third, while becoming a normal state, Russia should preserve the great power based on its nuclear weapons and veto right in the UN Security Council. Finally, this school tends to see Russia as the only bridge between Western civilization and the former Asian republics of the Soviet Union, a metaphor that endows Russia with a civilizing mission.

Hunter states that the final aspect of the Euro-Atlanticist school is important because “This view shows that, even as they argue for the necessity of shedding the ideological and other burdens of Russia’s past, the Euro-Atlanticists feel their influence. After all, both the czars and the Soviets justified their imperial expansion in terms of their civilizing mission, even if this meant the destruction of rich indigenous cultures.”¹⁰⁷

The Euro-Atlanticists expect the primary threat to Russia to come from nationalist and ethnic conflicts in the republics of the former Soviet Union and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Russia used the latter, Hunter says, to get Western acquiescence regarding its interventionist policies in these regions.

Hunter maintains that although the new Euro-Asianist school is different from the traditional Russian Euro-Asianist school, there are some similarities between them. As one

¹⁰⁶ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 148.

aspect of continuity, both believe that Russian foreign policy must shape the international environment to make it conducive to Russian reform and revitalization.

The Euro-Asianists differ from the Euro-Atlanticists in that they think that the objective can be achieved by restoring some of the territories that were lost during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although they believe in the necessity of having good relations with the West, they are opposed to "romanticized" relations with the West, because they think that the West does not want a strong Russia. Therefore, they think that Russia should not concentrate its policy on the West; it should rather broaden its policy to include the Middle East, China and India and pursue an independent foreign policy line.¹⁰⁸

In the evaluation of the threats, the Euro-Asianists agree with the Euro-Atlanticists, however. The Euro-Asianists maintain that the threats should be contained by securing the interior and exterior borders of the CIS and without creating hostility toward the Islamic world. Also, they believe in the importance of military force in Russian foreign policy.¹⁰⁹

The revolutionary expansionist school is represented by extreme nationalists as Vladimir Zhirinovsky. They contend that Russian security is best served by external expansion and by filling the vacuum on the periphery of the Russian Federation caused by the dissolution of the USSR.

The employment of these concepts may change according to the internal and external factors. Depending on these factors, Russian policy is likely to change from region to region and from time to time. One important external factor consists of the international, especially the Western, reactions. In this respect, Russian policy towards Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states is closer to the international institutionalist school of thought than to the defensive

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 149-150

realist school of thought. Of course, this policy is largely determined by Russia's economic breakdown—and the need for Western help—and the firmness of Western policy regarding these regions.

Regarding the southern periphery and particularly the Transcaucasus, where the Western policy is more ambiguous, Russian policy goes back and forth between the defensive and aggressive realist policies. As for the internal factors, specifically the Russian leaders, Hunter argues that even during the ascendancy of the Euro-Atlanticists in Russian foreign policy, roughly in 1992-1993, Euro-Asianist theories were prevalent in the Transcaucasus, because of the powerful proponents of these theories among the members of the parliament, the military leadership, the intelligence community, and even the foreign ministry.¹¹⁰ The unclear system of civilian control over peacekeeping operations and the lack of legal foundation for Russian peacekeeping operations were also contributing factors.¹¹¹

The school of internationalism has failed due to Western policies such as NATO expansion and Russia's disappointment regarding Western help in its transition to democracy and a market economy. The future of the revolutionary expansionism school also seems doubtful, at least for some time, because of a series of setbacks in Russian politics such as the lack of a consensus on national security policy, the lack of cohesion and discipline in the executive branch, and contradictions in civil-military relations.¹¹² The Russian economic breakdown and the lack of a strong ideology to unite extreme nationalists are reinforcing factors.

On the other hand, the fact that Luzkhov, Zyuganov, and Lebed—the three of the five possible candidates to succeed president Yeltsin—advocate the transfer of Sevastopol to Russia

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. pp. 150-151

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 151.

¹¹¹ Mikhail Tsypkin. "The Politics of Russian Security Policy." In *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. M. E. Sharpe. New York, 1995. p. 24.

and the other two, Chernomyrdin and Nemtsov, advocate nationalistic policies¹¹³ and the probability that, "If the economic situation of the officer corps continues to deteriorate it will feel increasingly betrayed by President Yeltsin and may very well turn toward extremist politics,"¹¹⁴ suggest that we may see more Russian interventionism in the Transcaucasus.

The picture gets grimmer when one considers that there are abundant opportunities for using military force in the "near abroad" and particularly in the Transcaucasus mainly "because of the weakness of the newly independent states, the proliferation of ethnic and civil conflicts there, the existence of the former Soviet military infrastructure there, and the resolute unwillingness of the international community to become involved."¹¹⁵

Even today, Russian policy in the region seems diplomatic and peaceful in its façade, whereas in its essence it has various coercive elements. One does not need to look closely to see Russian arm-twisting operations in Georgia and Azerbaijan. What is more dangerous is the high probability of a shift in the policy towards the revolutionary expansionism school of thought, depending on the new Russian leadership, its evaluation of threats to Russian interests in the region, and the economic circumstances in Russia.

¹¹² Ibid. pp. 36-37.

¹¹³ Alexander Yanov. "The Rape of Russia." Moscow News. 18 June 1998. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

¹¹⁴ Mikhail Tsypkin. "The Politics of Russian Security Policy." In *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. M. E. Sharpe. New York, 1995. p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 33.

V. THE UNITED STATES POLICY

All of the three Transcaucasus states and the United States share interests regarding three factors. First, the planned pipelines, which will carry the Caspian oil to the Western markets, will run through the Transcaucasus. The countries of the region need oil revenues to strengthen their economic independence as well as their political independence. Hence, both the oil-producing countries and the countries that the pipelines will pass through need United States technical assistance and hard currency to get the oil to the markets as soon as possible.

Second, the region is destabilized with political turmoil and armed conflicts which constitute significant obstacles to bringing the oil to the global market and absorb a great amount of the countries' economic resources. Therefore, the Transcaucasus countries look to the United States and to international organizations to resolve the regional conflicts.

Third, as long as the regional countries do not have significant military capabilities and continue to be weakened by conflicts, possibilities for intervention and domination and/or influence by an external power persist. Although today Russia has lost much of its influence, Moscow is trying to regain it by using ethnicities against each other and by presenting the regional conflicts as excuses for its military interventions.

According to American scholar William Odom, following World War II, the United States based its containment strategy on two zones; one of them was Western Europe and the other was Japan and South Korea. However, in accordance with growing Soviet power projection capabilities in the late 1970s, and war and instability in the Persian Gulf, the region was added as a third strategic zone, mainly because of Britain's withdrawal from this zone and the Western dependence on the region's oil production. The change was introduced with the so-called Carter Doctrine of 1980 and was used by successive United States administrations.

Finally, it was used against the Iraqi aggression. Odom contends that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not render these three strategic zones irrelevant, especially for the Transcaucasus and Central Asia.¹¹⁶

Shortly after the republics of the former Soviet Union gained their independence, the United States tried to “craft a policy which was realistic, supportive of the new states,” and based on its own national interests. In line with the United States interests in the Transcaucasus, first of all the United States “wanted to support the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the NIS” (newly independent states) and it “wanted them to become” its “partners as stable, secure, and prosperous members of the world community.”¹¹⁷

According to the same document, five major principles govern American relations with these states:

- Supporting efforts of the Newly Independent States (NIS) to democratize, develop market economies and pursue political reform, including respect for human rights.
- Encouraging them to integrate into international political and economic institutions and participate in European security structures.
- Promoting stable, cooperative relations among the NIS and aiding international mediation to resolve regional conflicts.
- Assisting these states to reduce weapons of mass destruction and to ensure proper handling of their constituent components.
- Advancing American business interests throughout the former Soviet Union.

¹¹⁶ William E. Odom. “US Policy toward Central Asia and South Caucasus.” Caspian Crossroads Magazine.

Summer 1997. Vol. 3. No. 1. Available [online]: < <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/>>

¹¹⁷ John E. Herbst, US Interests in the Caucasus, Hearing Before the US Congress House Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, US Government Printing Office (Washington: 1996), pp 2-3

In line with these principles, the United States established diplomatic missions in the three states of the Transcaucasus in 1992. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are members of the UN, the OSCE, and NATO's Partnership for Peace. They participate in economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The United States, by encouraging and supporting these moves, is trying to form a web of relationships bolstering the region's stability, independence, and prosperity. Also, it is encouraging cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

Nevertheless, turning words into deeds is a difficult challenge. The declared policies of the United States were shaped by domestic and external factors which led to inconsistent applications, especially in the first four or five years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the rule of the Soviet Union, the countries of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia were absent from the minds of the Western countries. Nevertheless, after the demise of the USSR, many people in the region and outside expected that the destiny of the eight countries emerging from these regions would change and that they would be treated as individual countries. However, according to Paul Goble, that has not yet occurred. "Instead outsiders have continued to neglect this diversity, preferring instead to treat this group of countries as a single whole and to examine it not in terms of variety, but only in terms of its collective impact on outsiders politically and economically."¹¹⁸

Even one or two years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many Americans did not know enough about the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. It was only after the oil firms realized the significance of the reserves that the politicians acknowledged the strategic value of these regions, although some have continued to question it.

¹¹⁸ Paul Goble. "From Myths to Maps: American Interests in the Countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus." Caspian Crossroads Magazine. Summer 1997. Vol. 3. No. 1. Available [online]: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/>

From the beginning of the reforms in the Soviet Union, the West's main concern was the continuation of the reforms and the prevention of chaos in the Soviet Union, which suggested support for the center. Thus, in essence, Western and in particular United States policy towards the Transcaucasus has been "Russia first" or Russo-centric in character.¹¹⁹

Former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out that United States policy towards the Transcaucasus became more realistic as time passed. In an interview in 1995, he said, "I am generally satisfied with the foreign policy of the United States. I think in the first year and one half, or maybe the first two years of the Clinton administration, there was a tendency to pursue what might be called the 'Russia first policy.' I don't think that is the case anymore. The administration now pursues a policy of furthering or promoting what I call 'geopolitical pluralism' in the states of the former Soviet Union. And I think that is the right policy."¹²⁰

American scholar Shireen T. Hunter asserted in her book that until the success of the ultra-nationalists in Russian parliamentary elections in December 1993, the prevalent view in the West tended to acknowledge the former Soviet republics—except the Baltic states and Ukraine—as being within Russia's sphere of influence provided that Russia continued to act appropriately on important security issues concerning Europe and the Middle East. The policy, however, began to change toward giving increasing individual attention to individual republics by mid-1994, owing in part to growing Western fears about Russian ambitions. Nonetheless, the magnitude of this change was not enough to affect significantly the course of events in the Transcaucasus. The West seemed to have accepted Russian hegemony in Armenia and Georgia

¹¹⁹ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 157.

and pursued a doubtful policy regarding Azerbaijan. The doubt stemmed from the fact that while the West seemed to be resisting Russian pressures in Azerbaijan, it did not appear willing to commit the necessary resources including, military assets.¹²¹

Georgia received some attention from the United States and the West due to its renowned president, but that was it. When it came to resolution of the conflicts and desperately needed help in building the Georgian army, the West could give nothing but advice. In July 1997, William Courtney, the United States ambassador to Georgia, was quoted as saying "that it is no longer possible to believe that Russian mediation would 'some day' help settle the Abkhazia conflict."¹²² He called for internationalization of peace talks on the Bosnia model.

The West was also resolved not to become entangled in the region militarily through establishing peacekeeping operations for the region's conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. This had severe consequences. Above all, it encouraged Russia in reasserting its influence in the region.¹²³

Another important objective of the United States policy towards the region was to promote Turkey as a model, especially for the Turkic countries. When the republics of the former Soviet Union began to gain their independence, the United States expected a cultural and geopolitical competition between Iran and Turkey, and wanted Turkic countries in particular to adopt the latter as a model. This particular policy was caused by the fear that Islamic fundamentalism would be attractive in these countries. While the exaggeration of the threat of

¹²⁰ Jayhun Molla-zade. "Recent Memoirs: An Interview with Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brezezinski." *Caspian Crossroads Magazine*. Summer 1995. Vol. 1. No. 3. Available [online]: <<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/>>

¹²¹ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 161

¹²² "Internationalize Abkhazia Settlement Talks, US Ambassador Advises." *Monitor*. 18 July 1997. Vol. 3. Is. 140. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

¹²³ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies. Washington, D.C. 1994. p. 159.

Islamic fundamentalism authorized and encouraged Russia's use of force in some regions, promoting Turkey as a model country conflicted with the "Russia first" policy. After realizing that the Iranian culture had little or no influence on these countries, United States policy focused on promoting stability and democracy in the region.

In April 1998, Stephen Sestanovich, the United States Ambassador at Large for the Newly Independent States, described the United States strategy toward the Transcaucasus and Central Asia as comprising four elements: first, strengthening modern political and economic institutions; second, regional cooperation and conflict resolution; third, energy development and the creation of an east-west energy transport corridor; and fourth, security cooperation, such as promoting the creation of the Central Asia Peacekeeping Battalion, and the establishment of security dialogues.¹²⁴

In the domain of conflict resolution, there have been some inconsistencies in United States policy. One of them is related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. When the OSCE Lisbon summit met with failure in introducing a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem in 1996, the United States Congress, under the influence of the Armenian diaspora, was trying to put Nagorno-Karabakh into a separate legal status. The United States Senator Robert Byrd argued against this move:

I understand that the House [of Representatives] included a provision, which would imply separate legal status to Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan. The international community, through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has already recognized the current borders of Azerbaijan as constituting its territorial integrity. Thus, a separate legal status for Nagorno-Karabakh is opposed by the international community and is against the policy of the United States.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Stephen Sestanovich. The US Role in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations. 30 April 1998. pp. 33-35. Available[online]:

<http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹²⁵ Congressional Record (25 July, 1997)

The apprehensions of both the international community and the United States about the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are illustrated in S. Sobhani's words. Sobhani, a lecturer at Georgetown University and the President of Caspian Energy Consulting, stated: "If the Cubans in Miami wake up and decide just because they are a majority in Miami that they want to declare independence and join Cuba, should not the rest of Florida object? Absolutely."¹²⁶

Enforced mainly by the pressure of the Armenian diaspora, section 907 of the Freedom Support Act has prevented the United States from providing aid to Azerbaijan. John E. Herbst, deputy coordinator for the NIS, explained the effects of the measure:

Unfortunately, our ability to encourage Azerbaijan's democratic and economic development has been sharply limited since 1992 by section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. This legislation has limited our aid to Azerbaijan since independence to \$80 million, this in a country which has 780,000 refugees and internally displaced people. By way of contrast, we have provided 612 million dollars in assistance to Armenia and 420 million dollars to Georgia. Not surprisingly, 907's limitations have extracted a sharp toll in American ability to influence Azerbaijan's progress in ways we have already seen yielding tangible results in neighboring Georgia and Armenia, as well as other NIS. Likewise, 907 hampered our ability to address Azerbaijan's pressing humanitarian needs.¹²⁷

Madeleine Albright, the United States Secretary of State, summarized the developments regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Commenting on Nagorno-Karabakh before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 8, 1997, Albright said,

Another dispute tangled by history and geography concerns Armenia, Azerbaijan and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The good news here is that the cease-fire has now held for more than two years. The bad news is that progress under the OSCE's Minsk process has been agonizingly slow. We have very substantial economic, political and humanitarian interests in the region, and are prepared to play a more visible role in helping to arrange a settlement. One step that Congress could take to increase our influence would be to lift restrictions on nonmilitary assistance to Azerbaijan.

¹²⁶ S. Rob Sobhani, "US, Iran, Russia, and Turkey: 'The struggle for Azerbaijan,'" in *The Caucasus and the Caspian 1996-1997 Seminar Series*, Volume 2 (Harvard University Press 1997), p 128

¹²⁷ John E. Herbst, US Interests in the Caucasus, Hearing Before the US Congress House Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, US Government Printing Office (Washington: 1996). p 35

Stephen Sestanovich, Ambassador-at-Large and Special Advisor to the United States Secretary of State for the Newly Independent States, has also commented on the subject. Speaking before the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, on April 30, 1998, on the United States policy toward the Transcaucasus and Central Asia, he said,

To be blunt, 907 has done nothing to bring us closer to a lasting peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Politically, Section 907 and related provisions are an impediment to our making progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, to our ability to work effectively with Azerbaijan on the East-West Eurasian transport corridor and to the ability of US firms to do business in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani government is strongly pro-US. It is being helpful to us on Caspian energy questions, on [nuclear] non-proliferation, on Iranian terrorism –and on Nagorno-Karabakh. Section 907 has limited, and will continue to limit, the expansion of US-Azerbaijani relations-and all, to no useful purpose.¹²⁸

Despite the fact that almost the entire executive branch supports the lifting of section 907, the provision still remains in force today because of the Armenian diaspora's strong influence within the United States Congress. In the United States Congress, the congressmen co-chairing the Armenian-American caucus often raise the issue of recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as a sovereign state. They argue that after Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia declared their independence, they were ultimately recognized by the United States. Thus, they say, there is no reason not to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh, following the same pattern.

In April 1998, in responding to a question, Sestanovich said,

We have believed that the interests of the United States and of our allies, friendly states and international peace are best served by respecting the territorial integrity of the states that emerged out of the former Soviet Union... The states of this region can be thrown into chaos if borders are up for grabs; and it is very easy for all borders to be up for grabs. The principle that we have subscribed to in the OSCE and before that in the CSCE, since the agreement of on the Helsinki final act in 1975, is that border changes should be peaceful and consensual.¹²⁹

Despite the intensive diplomacy and negotiations, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue has remained unsettled until now; and it would be naïve to think that it will be resolved overnight. Nevertheless, the United States policy towards the region is important because it has a significant

¹²⁸ <http://azer.com/AIWeb/Categories/Topics/Quotes/quote.sestanovich.html>

effect on the countries of the region. The United States policy continues to be an important factor in determining the security map of the region.

Until 1994 and even 1995, United States policy towards the region gave the impression that the United States obviously acknowledged the idea of an “exclusive sphere of influence” in the Transcaucasus. The critics argued that when evaluating Russia’s transition to democracy, the United States and Western governments have stressed the centrality of economic criteria and have paid less attention to Moscow’s policy vis-à-vis its neighbors as a sign of a willingness to relinquish old patterns and policies.¹³⁰

The perception of a tacit United States agreement to a Russian exclusive sphere of influence in the “near abroad” continued into 1998. In response to some United States congressmen’s arguments that the United States does not see the Transcaucasus and Central Asia as a future American sphere of influence in order to assuage Russian concerns, Sestanovich said, “It is from our point of view, one of the overriding goals of our policy towards this region that it not be part of anybody’s sphere of influence. That doesn’t mean that the countries of this region should not have good relations with Russia. It does mean that Russian influence, which is an understandable concern given the history of the Soviet Union, has to be exercised in legitimate ways, conforming to international law, respecting the sovereignty of these states.”¹³¹

When the presence of Russian troops in Georgia and Armenia was recalled and Sestanovich was requested to give information about the government’s stance on this issue, he replied, “We think that the governments of those countries have the right and are able to exercise

¹²⁹ Stephen Sestanovich. The US Role in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations. 30 April 1998. p. 51. Available [online]: <http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹³⁰ Senator Dennis Deconcini. “Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Hearing.” Federal News Service. 24 May 1994. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

the right to ask the Russian forces to leave. As long as they have that right, there is no objection that can be raised to them.”¹³²

Nevertheless, since roughly 1994-1995 United States policy toward the region has been developing in a positive direction. The increase in direct dialogues among the Transcaucasus countries and the United States is a good indication of this improvement. Recently, the United States has been more assertive regarding Russian policies such as the Russian-Indian project for building a nuclear power plant in southern India and Russian arms dealings with Iran¹³³. On December 10-11, 1998, during talks with Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, U. S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said that Russian authorities were not doing enough to stop the transfer of sensitive military technologies to Iran.¹³⁴ In response to the continuing technology transfers, the United States decided to impose sanctions against three Russian scientific institutes which it believed were involved in aiding Iran’s missile and nuclear programs.¹³⁵ In September 1998, Georgia’s Border Protection Forces declared that the United States is supporting the development of these forces financially and technically.¹³⁶

The extraction of the Caspian Sea Basin oil and its transportation to the world markets constitute a primary component of the United States policy. Today, the security and the stability of the region are intertwined with the energy security policy.

¹³¹ Stephen Sestanovich. The US Role in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations. 30 April 1998. p. 38. Available [online]: <http://www.house.gov/international_relations>

¹³² Ibid. p. 41. Available [online]: <http://www.house.gov/international_relations>

¹³³ “Washington Deplores Russian-Indian Nuclear Project.” Monitor. 24 June 1998. Vol.4. Is. 121. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [11 April 1999]

¹³⁴ “Moscow and Washington Remain Deadlocked over Russian-Iranian Defense Ties.” Monitor. 14 December 1998. Vol.4. Is. 230. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [11 April 1999]

¹³⁵ “U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Russian Research Institutes.” Monitor. 13 January 1999. Vol.5. Is. 8. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [11 April 1999]

¹³⁶ “United States Provides Assistance to Georgia’s Border Protection Forces.” Monitor. 18 September 1998. Vol.4. Is. 171. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [11 April 1999]

The Caspian Sea Basin contains huge hydrocarbon reserves. Natural gas reserves are estimated to be more than 236 trillion cubic feet, and oil reserves may well reach more than 60 billion barrels.¹³⁷ Since the region is landlocked and destabilized with political conflicts, a major problem is how to get the region's energy resources to the international markets.

In 1998, Federico Pena, then the United States Secretary of Energy, declared the Comprehensive National Energy Strategy of the United States as improving the efficiency of the overall United States energy system; ensuring against energy supply disruptions; promoting energy production and using energy in ways that respect health and environmental values; expanding future energy choices; and seeking international cooperation on global energy issues. As Secretary Pena emphasized, two of these comprehensive policy principles specifically apply to the Caspian Sea Basin region: ensuring against energy supply disruptions and seeking international cooperation on global energy issues. Both goals represent the United States' "view that the development of diverse, stable, and reliable sources of energy is important to United States national security and to the global economy."¹³⁸

In order to achieve these two broad goals, the United States identified five objectives: energy security; rapid development of the region's energy resources and trade linkages; supporting United States energy companies' investments around the world; opposing the proposals that would force more oil to the Persian Gulf or result in increasing vessel traffic through the Turkish straits; and fostering viable and reliable alternatives for export of the region's resources.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Robert. W. Gee. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 31. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹³⁸ Federico Pena. The US Role in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations. 30 April 1998. p. 11. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹³⁹ Ibid. pp. 11-12.

United States policy goals regarding energy resources in the region envisage “fostering the independence of the states and their ties to the West; breaking Russia’s monopoly over oil and gas transport routes; promoting Western energy security through diversified suppliers; encouraging the construction of east-west pipelines that do not transit Iran; and denying Iran dangerous leverage over the Central Asian economies.”¹⁴⁰

According to the same document, four factors frame this policy: first, promoting multiple export routes; second, emphasizing commerciality; third, cooperation with Russia; and the fourth, isolating Iran.¹⁴¹

Promoting multiple export routes emphasizes both rapid development of the region’s resources and their transportation and sale. The significance of the pipeline routes lies in the fact that the direction of the pipelines will also determine whether these countries will fall into a particular sphere of influence. Thus, the United States has strongly opposed a pipeline route through Iran, while favoring a plan with multiple pipeline routes, of which the major one will be the Baku-Ceyhan route. In other words, priority is given to the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline route which will extend from Baku via Georgia to Ceyhan, a Mediterranean port in southern Turkey. Although there are objections to the plan, including the argument that the Iranian route would be more cost-effective, United States containment policy against Iran constitutes an obstacle to pursuing this option. Officials argue that even if United States-Iranian relations were good, the United States would not want to “put all the eggs in the same basket” by relying exclusively on a pipeline traversing Iran.

¹⁴⁰ Doug Bereuter. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 7. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹⁴¹ Robert. W. Gee. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p.11. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

Emphasizing commerciality implies that while regional politics will influence the development of the export routes, commercial considerations will triumph in the end. For these gigantic infrastructure projects to proceed, they have to be commercially competitive. United States policy makers contend that their support for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline for the transportation of oil and gas is not motivated by any desire to intervene in private commercial decisions. Rather, they claim that it is in neither in the strategic nor the commercial interests of the oil companies and the owner states "to rely on a major competitor for transit rights."¹⁴² Also, they made it clear that the United States will not fund the construction of the pipelines. Nevertheless, it will provide the necessary technical assistance.

Cooperating with Russia suggests that United States policy regarding the Caspian Sea Basin is not intended to circumvent or thwart Russia. United States policy makers argue that the fact that two significant pipeline projects run across Russian soil proves this fact. One of the projects is the Azerbaijani International Operating Company northern early pipeline; and the other is the Caspian Pipeline Consortium from Kazakhstan through Russia to the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk. The former project is now complete and the latter is to be completed soon. The United States has maintained that it supports continued Russian participation in Caspian Sea Basin production and transportation.

Isolating Iran restates the unchanged United States policy regarding Iran. The United States believes that "Development of Iran's oil and gas industry and pipelines from the Caspian basin south through Iran will seriously undercut the development of east-west infrastructure, and give Iran improper leverage over the economies of the Caucasus and Central Asian states."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 11

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 13

Moreover, it states that transporting yet more energy resources through the Persian Gulf “makes no sense” from an energy security point of view.¹⁴⁴

According to Robert W. Gee, United States Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs, Department of Energy, even if the United States had normalized relations with Iran, private sector companies would still be concerned about risks associated with “investments in Iran because of the unpredictability of the decision making process in Iran.”¹⁴⁵

The United States implements its energy security policy by “pursuing an aggressive strategy with the regional governments.”¹⁴⁶ \$70 billion has been pledged to the region as foreign investment, of which the United States investment constitutes one half.¹⁴⁷ The fact that the Eurasian transport corridor will span at least six countries shows how challenging the project is. The number of the countries involved suggests that negotiations will be extremely complex. Thus, the United States wants to ensure that an agreement is reached on concrete project proposals among the concerned countries as soon as possible.

Azerbaijan is at the heart of these projects. The Caspian Sea Basin pipeline will carry the Kazakh and the Turkmen oil through Baku, and from that point with the Azerbaijani oil, to Ceyhan. The executive branch of the United States government has met with some difficulty in implementing the policy in Azerbaijan due to section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which prevents United States aid to Azerbaijan. United States officials have stated that this section has

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Robert W. Gee. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 22. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹⁴⁶ Doug Bereuter. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 13. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹⁴⁷ “Countries Weigh Strategies in the Great Oil Game.” Monitor. 9 April 1998. Vol.4. Is. 69. Available [online]: <<http://www.jamestown.org>> [10 January 1999]

hindered their ability to work closely with the government of Azerbaijan, and they have demanded the repeal of the section.¹⁴⁸

According to Strobe Talbott, the United States Deputy Secretary of State, in its essence, United States energy security policy aims to discourage any one country from dominating the resources and to urge all responsible states to cooperate in the exploitation of regional oil resources.¹⁴⁹

United States policy seeks to strengthen global energy security through diversification and the development of new sources of supply. Above all, United States policy seeks to diversify export routes, rather than depend on a single route, namely the Persian Gulf. United States officials face a problem at the technical level, which is caused by the Moscow-centered policies during the Soviet period. The existing pipeline structure, which was built during that period, tends to head north and west toward Russia, lacking any connections to the south and east.

Prominent politicians and strategic thinkers in the United States agree that if America only focused on getting the energy out and turned a blind eye to the significant problems of economic development and stability in the region, it would inadvertently place access to the energy resources at risk.

¹⁴⁸ Doug Bereuter. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 17. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

¹⁴⁹ Doug Bereuter. US Interests in the Central Asian Republics. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific. 12 February 1998. p. 7. Available [online]: < http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

VI. ANALYSIS

The three Transcaucasus states—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—have to consider the resolution of the conflicts taking place on their territories as the “number one” policy issue. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem is the only interstate conflict in the region; and not only did it bring two countries—Armenia and Azerbaijan—into a bitter war but it also created division lines between the region’s countries. Similarly, ethnic conflicts in Georgia have torn the country apart and increased the country’s dependence on Russia.

The three countries have to balance their relations between the West and Russia, while Russia has to moderate its policies towards these countries to receive Western help. Nevertheless, Armenia pursues pro-Russian policies whereas Azerbaijan and Georgia are pro-Western. On the other hand, all of them need reasonably positive relations with Russia because of Russia’s proximity, Russian infrastructures within these countries, and the lack of interest in the West to deal with the conflicts and the other problems in the region.

Besides prevalent economic backwardness as a legacy of the centralized Soviet system, the economic situation of the region’s countries worsened further due to the conflicts. Although Azerbaijan has significant amounts of energy resources, it currently lacks hard currency and thus needs Western credit to transport its oil to Western markets. Georgia and Armenia are not as fortunate in this regard; hence, they are more dependent on Russia.

Georgia and Azerbaijan are building their militaries from scratch. Unable to get necessary help from the West, Georgia has been pressuring Russia to help build the Georgian army whereas Moscow pays no heed to the matter simply because it seeks a dependent Georgia.

The countries of the region are in the beginning of their statehood and they are walking a troublesome road towards their complete independence. Their successes will depend mainly on

three important factors: Russian security policy, domestic stability and leadership, and Western policies and interests in the region.

When in early 1993 Yeltsin called on the world's leading powers to support the Russian troops' interventions in the former Soviet republics, they reacted indignantly. Towards the end of the year, however, the indignation had been transformed into acquiescence.¹⁵⁰

Although not all of Russia's actions in the region can be attributed readily to "empire-building," this motivation can not be overlooked. Indeed, it is difficult for the Russians to adapt to the current status of the Russian state in the international system. As the Russian economy keeps deteriorating and the cost of living increases, the nostalgia for the "good old days" of the Soviet Union becomes more prevalent among the Russian population. In 1994, a USIA poll in Russia indicated that 74 percent of the population of the Russian federation regretted the dissolution of the USSR; 70 percent did not believe that the Ukrainian nation was separate from the Russian nation; they did not think that Ukraine should be an independent country.¹⁵¹

Recently, Moscow's reactions to the NATO operations against Serbia and its attempt to get involved in the conflict by sending naval ships to the Adriatic Sea suggest at least three important points. First, the Russians want to strengthen the image that Russia continues to be a great power and that it can not be kept out of significant world events. Second, by supporting Serbia, the Russian government wants to ease the pressures exerted by the Russian right and the communists and at the same time it wants to send the message that it will not let down the traditional friendships formed over the centuries. Third, Russia considers it in its interests to demonstrate its ability to project power beyond its borders. It should nonetheless be noted that

¹⁵⁰ Sophie Shihab. "Moscow Goes Meddling in the Caucasus." *Manchester Guardian Weekly*. 22 august 1993. P. 14. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

¹⁵¹ Paul Goble. "Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Hearing." Federal News Service. 24 May 1994. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

the ships involved are for intelligence-gathering, not combat. President Yeltsin has said that Russia will not be drawn into fighting, nor will it transfer arms to Serbia.

Despite the current Russian rhetoric and actions which suggest that Moscow does not accept the principle of the independence and sovereignty of the countries of the former Soviet Union, United States policy has at times implicitly condoned Russia's misconduct. The United States foreign policy focus has been more on Russia than the Transcaucasus. The West's lack of concern is completely in contrast with the Russian actions in the region. In 1995, the former United States Secretary of State James Baker acknowledged this phenomenon and encouraged United States officials to support reform in the NIS and to promote their independence and territorial integrity.¹⁵²

The United States has taken Russia's national interests into consideration by allowing Russia to participate in the international oil consortium. United States aid to Russia amounted to \$4.5 billion in 1997. Washington also provided Russia with loan guarantees and investment capital and included Russia in the international space station project. Russia's response has included its nuclear reactor sales to Iran and India, advanced arms and military sales to China, pressure on the former Soviet states to accept the stationing of Russian troops and border guards on their territories, reluctance to ratify the START II treaty, and its alleged continuation of developing chemical and biological weapons.¹⁵³

The shortcoming of United States policy in the Transcaucasus may be explained by United States preoccupations with serious scenarios concerning the future of Russia and thus the

¹⁵² Jayhun Mollazade. "The State of Affairs in the Transcaucasus: An Interview with the Honorable Former Secretary of State James Baker." *Caspian Crossroads Magazine*. Spring 1995. Vol. 1. No. 2. Available [online]: <<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/casp.htm>>

¹⁵³ Benjamin A. Gilman. US Assistance to the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union. Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations. 11 March 1997. pp. 6-7. Available [online]: <http://www.house.gov/international_relations/>

world. Some argue that a hard-line United States reaction to Russian actions in the region would only function to renew the divisions which separated the world for the forty-plus years of the Cold War. Hence, one significant reason for the relatively indulgent United States policy regarding Russian behavior in the Transcaucasus is the concern that confrontation over additional issues, beyond United States policy regarding the Persian Gulf and the enlargement of NATO, could alienate Russia and lead to a return to something like the Cold War. Therefore, the United States has apparently accepted—not officially but on a tacit basis—that there are certain Russian interests regarding the former republics of the Soviet Union (or in Russian terms, in the “near abroad”) that should be recognized. This notion can be regarded as rational if we consider the fact that relations between countries are based on national interests. However, a significant rule here is that national interests must be pursued, whenever possible, according to a mutual agreement between states and must respect international law. The rationality maintains its validity to the extent that the recognition of a sphere of interest is not transformed into recognition of a sphere of influence in the region. This point is, in fact, recognized as a principle by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and accepted by all participating countries. The OSCE has clearly stated that “Co-operative security presupposes non-hegemonic behaviour on the part of participating states; it requires a true partnership based on mutual accountability, transparency and confidence at both the domestic and the foreign policy level.”¹⁵⁴

Another factor that may explain the United States reluctance to oppose the Russian actions in the Transcaucasus could be an impression in Washington that the problems in the Transcaucasus are not related to Moscow’s empire-building but simply to the region’s complex

¹⁵⁴ General Information Document. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Homepage. Available [online]: <<http://www.osce.org/e/overview.htm>>

and sensitive inter-state and inter-ethnic relations. Although this impression could help to explain United States reticence, it is a fact that Russia deals most directly and forcefully with these complex issues. Moscow does everything it can to exclude the West from the region. Nor are the Western countries—including the United States—eager to get involved in the region's problems.

The United States and the international organizations could not demonstrate the same degree of success in the internationalization of the Abkhazia conflict that they had achieved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Besides providing humanitarian aid, foreign governments have tried to restore political stability through international organizations. The OSCE has struggled to work out agreements on frameworks for political settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh and Georgia. It has had an active role in mediating conflicts. However, to date, all the problems have remained unresolved.

Nonetheless, United States policy has been changing in favor of the countries of the region lately. The improvement in direct dialogues between the United States and the Transcaucasus countries may be a harbinger of a shift from a predominantly Russo-centric policy towards a more balanced policy which respects the countries of the region as equal partners. Yet, the turmoil of the post-Cold War period has not ended. There is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the future of Russia and its policies towards the republics of the former Soviet Union. As Russian reactions to NATO's Kosovo operation suggest, Russian-United States relations are extremely fragile and subject to dramatic changes depending on the Western policies on Russia's periphery. On April 10, 1999, Russian President Boris Yeltsin—under considerable pressure from the nationalist right and the communists since the beginning of the air strikes in Yugoslavia—warned that a NATO ground operation in Kosovo “would not be left unanswered

by Moscow.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise, recent news reports reveal that since NATO air-strikes began in Yugoslavia on March 24, 1999, the number of Russians who do not like the United States has increased from 28 percent to 72 percent.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, Moscow faces a dilemma when it comes to pursuing anti-American policies. Russia needs Washington's assistance to get desperately needed financial support from the West. It was mainly for this reason that, although Moscow strongly protested the Iraq policy of the United States publicly, Russian officials indicated in their private talks that “they do not want the issue to inflict serious harm on Russian-United States relations”¹⁵⁷

Taking these complex relations into consideration, it can be said that further pushing by the United States could cause Russia to be more interventionist in the Transcaucasus. However, as British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said regarding the Kosovo crisis, “It can not be in Russia’s long-term interest to isolate itself in the Balkans with [Yugoslav President Slobodan] Milosevic at a time when he himself is more isolated than ever among the countries in the region.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ “Yeltsin Warns of Possible World War over Kosovo” CNN. 10 April 1999. Available [online]: <http://cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/10/kosovo.russia.diplomacy.01/>

¹⁵⁶ “NATO Strikes Loosen U.S.-Russia Ties” CNN. 17 April 1999. Available [online]: <http://cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/17/u.s.Russia.relations/>

¹⁵⁷ “Russia and United States Want to Start 1999 on the Right Foot.” *Monitor*. 4 January 1999. Vol. 5. Is. 1. Available [online]: <http://www.jamestown.org> [11 April 1999]

¹⁵⁸ “Yeltsin Warns of Possible World War over Kosovo” CNN. 10 April 1999. Available [online]: <http://cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/10/kosovo.russia.diplomacy.01/>

VII. CONCLUSION

Throughout the centuries, the Transcaucasus has been a crossroads of civilizations, and it has been the venue of landmark events which significantly shaped history. It has remained a major fault-line between the world's great powers. The existence of energy resources in the region highlights its importance for the international community.

Considered as a whole, the influence of Western policy in the Transcaucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been short-sighted and ineffective. While it has allowed Russia to reassert its influence in the region, it has done little to improve regional cooperation and to promote economic development.

The presence of the UN, the OSCE, and of various NGOs in the region internationalized the conflicts and made Russia's pursuit of hegemonic aspirations illegitimate and less feasible, despite the fact that most of the efforts of these entities have to date not been successful in resolving the conflicts. Nevertheless, despite the interest expressed by Western governments and the Transcaucasus countries themselves in alternatives to the Russian military presence and political influence in the region, it seems that Russia will continue to be the only power willing to conduct peacekeeping operations in the Transcaucasus. No other power is willing to engage militarily in the region. In 1994, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze expressed his helplessness concerning Russian peacekeeping forces on Georgian soil when he said, "if you have alternatives, tell us what they are."¹⁵⁹

Russia asserts that the Transcaucasus is critically important because it borders the most restive region of the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus. From the perspective of stability, the Caucasus is an integral whole. It would be a mistake to separate the North Caucasus and the

¹⁵⁹ Ronald Suny. "Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Hearing." Federal News Service. 24 May 1994. Available[LEXIS/NEXIS]. [5 January 1999]

Transcaucasus. There is a great deal of interaction between the developments in these regions. Consequently, tensions at the local level are reflected in the regional and global arenas. Ethnic tensions and conflicts among the states of this region can easily spill over the borders, destroy local security structures, and thereby affect global security. This is an important element of the regional dynamics.

Russia could bolster stability in the region, if it chose to do so. If Russia decides to be constructive and cooperative, it should revise its policies towards the region. Otherwise, the West should be ready to counter Russian neo-imperialism. If Russia wants to be a member of the Euro-Atlantic community envisaged in the NATO-Russia Founding Act and other documents signed by Moscow, it has to liberate itself from its zero-sum game mentality and cooperate with the other members of that community. Russia has to realize that neo-imperialism would take away more than it would bring, because it would alienate Russia's neighbors, create new antagonisms, and increase the costs of the military establishment.

As the economy of Russia deteriorates, Pavel Baev has observed, there may be grounds for a growing fear in the West: "Facing the fact that its military presence is becoming unsustainable, Russia might abandon its present conflict freezing policy in favour of a more cost-effective conflict playing strategy."¹⁶⁰

Russia feels insecure when the other actors in the region, particularly major governments of the West, develop close relationships with the Transcaucasian countries. On the other hand, the Transcaucasian countries also feel insecure because Russia's pursuit of its security interests encroaches on the interests of the Transcaucasian countries. Russia restricts the scope of action of these countries and stunts their development.

¹⁶⁰ Pavel K. Baev. "Can Russia Do It Alone in the Caucasus?" *Perceptions*. Available [Online] <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/groupf/percept/default.htm>

Regarding the newly independent states and particularly Russia, United States policy should promote compliance with OSCE principles. For Russia to become a respected member of the international community, Russia itself has to respect the sovereignty of the NIS, including those of the Transcaucasus. The West and particularly the United States have to avoid policies aimed at promoting one particular regional power over the rest, because this would only intensify the process of national fragmentation, especially in Georgia, and facilitate Russian hegemony in the region.¹⁶¹

Given that the Transcaucasus states do not have enough strength to resist Russia's influence and that they can not get necessary political and economic support from the West, it seems that the future of the Transcaucasus will be largely affected by Moscow. The precise form of that future will in large part depend on Russia's leaders and their policies towards the region.

Guarding its own borders is an important symbol of independence and sovereignty for a country. In this regard, the United States should help Tbilisi replace the Russian border guards on the Georgian borders with Georgia's own troops. This would constitute a significant step towards complete independence.

The United States should pursue a more assertive policy in the region. This does not mean that the United States should see the region as falling within its own sphere of influence. Rather, the United States should interact with these countries as it does with the other independent countries of the world, and it should expect every country to respect the independence and sovereignty of the Transcaucasus countries.

In promoting security in the Transcaucasus, the countries of the region bear a special responsibility. The regional powers—especially, Iran, Russia, and Turkey—have to (a) bolster

¹⁶¹ Shireen T. Hunter. *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*. Washington DC. (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994) p 186

regional security and economic co-operation and (b) support the political and economic development of the newly independent states in the Transcaucasus, if they wish to promote peace in this region. Whether all three of these countries will play a constructive role remains to be seen.

Turkey occupies a significant geographical location vis-à-vis the Transcaucasus countries. Its proximity to the region and its role as the only NATO country in the area are only two of the factors that make Turkey an important actor in both the prevention of conflicts and the maintenance of international peace and stability in the Transcaucasus. United States-Turkish cooperation is essential in this regard.

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